

WOMEN AND CLASS: POWER DYNAMICS IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Spanish
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the representation of working-class women in the literary and cultural production of 20th Century Mexico. Chapter 2, “*Servientas, Patronas, and Housework: The Place of Domestic Work in Mexican Culture*,” looks at the relationships between women of opposing social strata in texts by well-known Mexican writers. The chapter proposes a textual analysis to explore the complexity of the power relationship between employer and employee in everyday interactions. Chapter 3, “*Substitute Motherhood: Nannies in Mexican Culture*,” explores the ultimately failed mothering of upper-class children by working-class women in texts such as *Balún Canán*, *La “Flor de Lis,”* and *Como agua para chocolate*. Chapter 4, “*The Borders of Crime and Gender in Maquiladora Cultural Production*,” looks at the “punishment” to which *maquiladora* workers are subjected for altering the patriarchal order of society. By exploring the power dynamics in the workplace, this project seeks to bring previously overlooked working-class female characters to the forefront of a feminist academic discussion.

A todos los ángeles de mi guarda;

***Mamá:** por creer siempre en mí y por cuidarme desde el cielo*

Papá: por cuidarme desde aquí y por querer lo mejor para mí

Tío Mon (c. 1916 – 2009): por quererme incondicionalmente y por enseñarme a leer

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the support of many, many people. I would like to thank my advisor and dissertation chair, Professor Rolando Romero for his guidance and, above all, for believing in me and in my project. I am eternally grateful to the members of my dissertation committee: Professors Dara Goldman, Emily Hind, and Alejandro Lugo for their unconditional support and the incredible feedback they provided along the way. I also would like to thank all administrative assistants in the School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, especially Ms. Mary Ellen Fryer.

I would like to thank my entire family for their unconditional love and support. Thanks mom, dad, Laura, *tío* Mon, *tía* Paula, *tíos* Pedro y María, and ALL my nieces and nephews.

I am forever indebted to the many friends who have shared with me the joy and, agony of getting a Ph.D. Thank you ALL so much! Last, but not least, I would like to thank my TLU colleagues and students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: CLASS AND FEMINISM IN MEXICO

Yo les advierto que las mujeres mexicanas estamos echando vidrio acerca de lo que hacen nuestras primas y estamos llevando un apunte para cuando sea necesario. Quizá no ahora ni mañana. Porque el ser un parásito (que es lo que somos, más que unas víctimas) no deja de tener sus encantos. Pero cuando el desarrollo industrial del país nos obligue a emplearnos en fábricas y oficinas, y a atender la casa y los niños y la apariencia y la vida social y, etcétera, etcétera, entonces nos llegará la lumbre a los aparejos. Cuando desaparezca la última criada, el colchoncito en que ahora reposa nuestra conformidad, aparecerá la primera rebelde furibunda.
--Rosario Castellanos

But what makes the domination of a group, a caste, or a class, together with the resistance and revolts which that domination come up against, a central phenomenon in the history of societies is that they manifest in a massive and universalizing form, at the level of the whole social body, the locking together of power relations with relations of strategy and the results proceeding from their interaction.
--Michel Foucault

1.1 Introduction

My reasons for embarking on this research project are varied and many. As it always happens, one would hope, dissertations put on paper issues that for one reason or another is very close to writer's "heart." This particular case is no exception. The representation of Mexican working-class women both in Mexico and in the U.S. is indeed close to my heart. As a child I remember sitting with my mother in the afternoons to watch *telenovelas*. I sat there watching those fictional lives unfold right before my eyes while I prayed for my life to be as exciting as those of the characters on my TV set. I secretly kept hoping that one day a rich parent who abandoned me as a child would come back to claim me and let me know that I had just inherited a fortune. After all that was exactly what had happened to *La fieras*, it was surely possible for it

to happen to me. As I grew up, I began to realize that *telenovelas* were indeed a fantasy and that I would never be a character in a fairy tale. Moreover, I began to notice that the women around me, both in my family and at school, were far from living the wonderful lives of the women they loved watching on television. My mother had stopped working as a maid after my birth, my sister worked in a hospital kitchen, and my classmates and friends started working at the *maquiladoras* right after they finished their elementary education. It was then that I began to wonder why *telenovelas* presented stories featuring beautiful light-skinned protagonists leading glamorous lives while their dark-skinned nannies just stood in the background supporting them. If their stories were not being told, I decided, they did not matter. And, while it was common for *telenovelas* of the 80's to allow poor women to marry rich men, the (female) actors portraying those women did not look like the working women I knew.

Unlike my peers and the women in my family, I was privileged enough to not have to work right after elementary school and, instead, continue my education. Ironically, it was only through formal education that I realized that the stories of the women in the backdrop of the stories merited being told and studied.

When writing about her experience as a paid worker performing manual labor, as research for her *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Barbara Ehrenreich acknowledges her position of privilege with regards to that of the women who actually have to earn a living performing such type of work. She notes:

I am, of course, very different from the people who normally fill America's least attractive jobs, and in ways that both helped and limited me. Most obviously, I was only visiting a world that other inhabit full-time, often for most of their lives. With all the real-life assets I've built up in middle age—bank account, IRA,

health insurance, multiroom home—waiting indulgently in the background, there was no way I was going to “experience poverty” or find out how it “really feels” to be a long-term low-wage worker. My aim here was much more straightforward and objective—just to see whether I could match income to expenses, as the truly poor attempt to do every day.

Similarly, while my own biography places me close to the working-class experience, I recognize my own position of privilege with regard to many of the characters discussed in this text. Furthermore, I recognize that without my position of privilege, bringing working-class female concerns to light would simply not be possible.

1.2 Background

Growing up in a working-class Mexican community on the Mexico-U.S. border, hearing stories about people crossing the border to look for a better way of living for their families was quite common. Moreover, the stories about Mexican women leaving their children to the care of other relatives in the homeland to work in the United States were not only close to home, they were *at home*. My mother was a working woman. Although she had been “trained” to be a wife and a mother, and married for the first time at 16 years of age, her husband’s leaving the home forced her to enter the workforce.

In her *Declaración de fe*, a discussion on the place of women in Mexico throughout the centuries, Rosario Castellanos looks at texts written by female writers to offer explanations to the reasons for the perceived passivity of women in Mexican society. When analyzing a play by Teresa Farías de Isasi she concludes:

Que a la mujer hay que educarla no para que sea independiente sino para que por propia convicción defienda, hasta el sacrificio, los principios patriarcales. La

forma de educación debería ser privada y reducida a inculcar en la alumna las ideas de castidad, de fidelidad, de lealtad al padre, al hermano o al marido, en suma, al hombre como entidad abstracta, como objeto de meditación religiosa y no como esos horrendos seres de carne y hueso que la protagonista tenía enfrente. (106)

That every woman must be educated not so that she is independent, but so that, by her own accord, she defends to the point of sacrifice patriarchal principles. Female education should have been private and limited to instill the ideas of chastity, fidelity, and loyalty to the father, to the brother or husband, in sum, to men as an abstract entity, as an object for religious meditation and not as those horrendous being of flesh and blood that the protagonists had in front of her¹

While married, my mother, much like the object of Castellanos' discussion, fulfilled the expectations of the traditional Mexican woman. When she divorced her husband, however, she failed to fulfill such expectations. She could no longer afford to stay home, and she had to find a way to support her seven children. But providing for her family meant searching for ways of getting financial stability wherever she could find it. When economic opportunities were not available for a woman with only elementary education in her own community, she did what was most natural for her: she migrated to the United States. Once in the new country she did what was most natural to a housewife: she found employment as a housekeeper/nanny for both Mexican-American and Anglo-American families. Her "bold" move had many repercussions that are, to this day, felt by her now grown-up children.

¹ All translations mine.

Although she would never think of herself as a feminist, and she is not by the mainstream definition of a feminist, her decision to leave her children behind to be able to provide for them, I argue, offers an alternative view of a feminist way to conduct one's life. Cecilia Ballí talks about the women in her family and their non-traditional feminist training that recognized the significance of motherhood:

[...] From the moment a woman conceives her child, she offers up part of her body for something bigger. So, if a feminist should not sacrifice, but mothers must, does it follow that mother cannot be feminists? What my mother showed me is that sometimes, we improve our lot as women together and through each other. Suggesting that women are only fully realized when they have an important job, a wholesome family and spiritual well-being assumes that they have access to a decent education, to daycare, to money to pay somebody else to clean the house, to a few extra hours to spend on fulfilling pastimes. It denies the many achievements of all those other women—working-class women, immigrant women, women of color, single mothers—who work wonders with the little they have. (“Thirty-Eight” 197)

Just like Ballí's mother, mine did what she could to provide for her seven children with the very little money she earned cleaning houses and cooking for other families. Without formal feminist training, she was indeed practicing a brand of unassuming feminism common to so many working-class women. She willingly sacrificed seeing her children grow up in the name of providing financially for them. She became, in fact, the head of her family when she entered the workforce so that her children could have food, shelter, and education and in the process she became an unwilling feminist.

1.3 Transclass Relationships

The film *Cama adentro* (*Live-in Maid*) offers a close look at the transclass relationship between two middle-aged women in contemporary Argentina. The film opens to the image of a woman struggling to get the last drop out of a bottle of glass cleaner. That woman is Dora (Norma Argentina), a long-time maid to Beba (Norma Aleandro), a divorced upper-class woman. Beba's new marital status leaves her unable to keep up with her lavish way of life. Her critical financial situation makes it impossible for her not only to pay for Dora's services, but even to afford food and basic necessities such as cleaning supplies. Despite her not getting paid Dora remains loyal to Beba helping her keep up the appearances before her friends. Eventually Beba's finances become so strained that she has to sell her valuables to be able to pay for her house expenses. Dora, however, decides that she can no longer wait to be paid and leaves her job. Beba and Dora share a strong bond that is hard to destroy even when they dissolve the working relationship. Soon after Dora leaves Beba becomes completely unable to pay for the utilities to keep up her house and must sell it to survive. Beba has no place to go after selling her house and shows up unexpectedly at Dora's working-class neighborhood small house with all her belongings. The film closes with the suggestion that the two women will become roommates after Dora discovers her lover having an affair with another woman.

Although Beba's financial demise places her in a desperate situation, and Dora proves to be more economically stable, the relationship between the two women always seems to place the former in a position of superiority with regard to the latter. A closer look at their relationship, however, shows a different picture. On the one hand, while Dora is always aware of her subordinate position as a servant, she also demonstrates the ways in which she can exert a certain amount of power. Namely, she is able to leave her job when it is not longer profitable, and she

has a better relationship with Beba's daughter than she herself. She can successfully place herself outside of her category of a servant to show that she is an independent woman who owns a home where she is the boss rather than the servant. Beba, on the other hand, desperately clings to her status, even when all her resources depleted, and refuses to place herself outside of her upper-class category. Although by film's end Dora is a homeowner while Beba no longer owns property, their hierarchical relationship remains unchanged.

In the American film *Crash*, director Paul Haggis offers a critical look at the complexity of racial/ethnic relations in the United States. Specifically, the film explores such relationships in the contexts of the diverse city of Los Angeles. Although the salient theme of the film revolves around race, racial tensions open the door for a discussion on class. When Jean Cabot (Sandra Bullock), the wife Los Angeles' District Attorney falls down the stairs and hurts herself, she is unable to get any of her friends to take her to the hospital. The only person who is available and willing to take her to the emergency room is her Latina maid, Maria. The complexity of their relationship becomes apparent throughout the film with Jean often criticizing Maria's work and showing hostility towards her, and yet calling her "her very best friend" at the end of the film. Even though the film's conclusion does not make it clear whether the relationship between the two women will undergo a positive change after the incident, Jean's reaction to the help provided by her maid is worth noting. While often regarding her maid as an object rather than as a human being, Jean finds that despite her dehumanizing, Maria is the only person capable of tending to her. Although the two women might never be able to transcend their class training, their exchange shows a bond that transcends inequality, if only momentarily.

1.4 Feminist-Class Discussions in the Mexican Context

Rosario Castellanos, one of the most prominent Mexican feminists to this day, understood woman's experience as univocal. In an article originally published in *Excélsior* she declares her disappointment at the fact that Mexicans are indifferent to the Women's Rights Movement occurring in the United States at the time: "Es normal que tomemos esa actitud cuando nos referimos a los negros, a los chicanos, a la guerra en Vietnam. Nuestras condiciones son absolutamente distintas y ese tipo de problemas no se presenta entre nosotros. Pero el de las mujeres..." [It is normal that we take such attitude when referring to Blacks, Chicanos, to the Vietnam War. Our situation is completely different and those types of problems do not affect us. But the problem of women...] ("Casandra" 563). Although progressive in her views and her work, Castellanos statement situates her feminist position at a time when the diversity of women's experience was still not acknowledged. Moreover, Castellanos highlights the impossibility of women's emancipation in Mexican society when she discusses the gap between what in theory women are entitled to and how, in what they get in practice adds to the many roles women play. Responding to the idea that the old Partido Revolucionario Institucional [PRI] (in the 1960's) wanted fairer laws to protect women's rights, Castellanos writes that emancipation is more than a balancing act:

Porque la mujer mexicana tiene que ser, de manera simultánea y ubicua, el cimiento inmovible del hogar y uno de los pilares de la fábrica, de la oficina, del aula. Tiene que dedicar su atención—con la misma intensidad—al cuidado físico, moral e intelectual de sus hijos en proceso de desarrollo y a los problemas que le plantea su trabajo, su participación en la vida comunitaria, su examen de la

realidad política en la que se supone que es un factor determinante. (“El queso” 326)

Because the Mexican woman must simultaneously be the unmovable foundation of the home and one of the bases of the factory, the office, the classroom. She has to devote her attention—with the same intensity—to her developing children’s physical, moral and intellectual well-being, and to the problems at work, her community, and the political life for which she is supposed to be a determining factor.

Castellanos’ view of the possibility of women advancing socially in mid 20th Century Mexico, it recognizes that such advancement, in actuality, places added responsibilities and expectations. For women are expected, above all, to perform their domestic duties regardless of whether they also work outside the home.

Feminism in Mexico re-emerges in the 1970’s when university professors and other professional women, influenced by their Second-Wave European and American counterparts, start advocating a societal change favorable to women. Feminist concerns during this period were mainly about their work in the house as well as child care. Their positionality, as educated middle-class women, was significant as they did not have to perform domestic labor at home. Marta Lamas explains that “al tener resuelto individualmente el trabajo doméstico y de cuidado de los hijos, con empleadas domésticas, la mayoría vive el feminismo más bien como un instrumento de análisis o de búsqueda personal y no como una necesidad organizativa para enfrentar colectivamente esa problemática” (having individually resolved the issue of domestic work and child care with domestic workers, most of these middle-class feminists sees feminism as an analytical tool or as a personal search, and not as a necessary form of organizing in order to

collectively fight against domestic oppression) [*Feminismo* 16]. Their attempt to include working women in their feminist agenda, therefore, fails as working-class women do not show an interest in the “feminist” cause. According to Lamas in “The Mexican Feminist Movement and Public Policy-Making,” working-class women were not interested in fighting against patriarchy when they had other, more tangible, preoccupations closer to them. Another important characteristic of this phase within the feminist movement is what Lamas calls *mujerismo*. Under the essentialist premise of *mujerismo*, there is not to be differences between the many manifestations of female experiences. As such, there were no visible leaders; and without them, there was no visible feminist activity.

The next phase of the feminist movement (in the 1980’s) constituted a dormant period until the earthquakes of 1985 re-energized Mexican feminist eager to help the victims through mobilization. It is during this period that working-class women and feminists come together to organize and demand attention to issues of work and civic action. This meeting was, nevertheless, problematic as working-class women, Lamas warns, were not motivated by the three basic feminist premises: the right to abortion, the rejection of violence against women, and respect to one’s sexual orientation (*Feminismo* 22).

The electoral crisis of 1988 resulted in a heightened civic conscience and many feminists feel the need to express their disagreement with the political system. In the 1990’s feminists start to recognize the importance of active political participation as Lamas asserts: “Si en los años setenta y ochenta el antipriísmo² de la mayoría feminista se tradujo en antigobiernismo opuesto a cualquier acción conjunta con instancias gubernamentales, en los noventa las ideas sobre la participación ciudadana estimulan la necesidad de influir las políticas públicas” (If in the

² *Antipriísmo* refers to the total rejection of the practices and policies of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) that governed Mexico for most of the 20th Century.

seventies and eighties the *antipriísmo* of the feminist majority translated into an anti-government sentiment opposing any work in conjunction with the government, in the nineties the ideas about civic action encourage the need to influence public policy) [*Feminismo* 29]. The political awareness of women during this period results in mobilizing to increase representation in the public sphere demanding that political parties establish a quota to correct the underrepresentation of women.³ Additionally, the 1990's saw a dramatic increase in the number of feminist *organizaciones no gubernamentales* (ONG's).⁴ These changes in the nineties materialized at the onset of the 21st Century with the increased participation of women in politics and the acceptance that, in order to affect change, the female presence in all branches of government was necessary.

One of the most salient characteristics of Mexican feminism is the historic conflict between theory and practice. While the movement started with the participation of middle-class, university-educated women, it sought to include working-class women. When the desired alliance failed, it was very clear that working-class women wanted to resolve pragmatic issues. *El feminismo popular* (popular feminism) advocates for women's concern, although such concerns are not always in line with a more traditional feminist agenda. Lamas defends the idea that feminist theory is a needed element to avoid personal accounts that end up in differences among feminists. Moreover, feminist theory, she asserts, is the foundation for successful political advancement (*Feminismo* 127).

1.5 Feminist-Class Discussions in the Chicana Context

Elena Poniatowska, in a public lecture published in 1996, examines the tensions between Mexicans and Chicanos while addressing the complexities of the Chicano experience. Faced by

³ According to Marta Lamas, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) was the first one to establish that there cannot be more than 70% of men in the party's administration.

⁴ Non-government agencies

the uncertainty of a good future in their country, poor Mexicans look to the United States as a place where they can achieve a better standard of living. Once settled in the United States, working-class Mexicans and Americans of Mexican descent become Chicanos, and encounter a harsh reality. On the one hand, they are rejected by Mexicans because of their class and ethnic backgrounds. On the other hand, Anglo Americans place them in the lowest social rank because of their national origin. Poniatowska sums up her view of the place of poor Mexicans in their country and lists it as their reason for migrating to the United States, when she states that: “To say that Mexico abandoned its people would not be false, because Mexico abandons all poor Mexicans. The poor choose the American dream and the American way of life on the other side of the border, because they don’t see a future for themselves in their own country.”

(“Mexicanas” 36) Therefore, Chicana literature reflects such complex working-class and immigrant experiences. Unlike their Mexican counterparts, who come from the upper-classes, Chicanas have “an immediate relationship with the fields and factories” (46). The function of writing signals different things for writers of opposing classes. Poniatowska observes that:

For the Mexican woman writer, writing is an under product of her social situation. For the Chicanas, writing is a means to overcome their social situation. It is the confrontation of two classes. We [Poniatowska includes herself] come from the Mexican middle class that can travel and settle in the United States under optimum conditions. Money, let us remember, has no fatherland. Money has no fatherland, but the way of spending it does. There is a culture of waste that is the result of excessive riches. (“Mexicanas” 47)

The role of writing in the lives of Chicana writers and critics, therefore, offers the work at hand the necessary foundation for a discussion of class in the Mexican context. Evidently, the

Mexican working-class experience is not the same as the U.S. and/or immigrant experience. Nevertheless, the work by Chicana critics touches on issues more closely related to such experience than Mexican feminist critics would.

1.6 Sirvientas, Nanas y Obreras⁵

The following chapters explore the cultural representations of three characters that, in my view, are vital for a discussion of class and gender in Mexico that seeks to be inclusive. All too often the marginality of lower working-class characters in cultural production points to the blind spot in Mexican feminism. Moreover, class discussions in Mexican culture often overlook the issue of race and ethnicity that is almost always linked to class. Through the study of maids, nannies, and *maquiladora* workers in literature and film, this work aims to open up a space for an inclusive brand of feminism. The recognition of the diversity of female experiences should be put in the forefront of the feminist discussion. Specifically, Lamas warns about the dangers of essentialism with regard to “female identity”:

Es totalmente legítimo reivindicar la identidad, pero tomando en cuenta la multiplicidad de los discursos y de las relaciones de poder que la atraviesan. Además, no existen identidades monolíticas sino múltiples y fracturadas. Las identidades singulares son siempre construcciones míticas. No existe “la mujer”; esa identidad está cruzada por otras: mujer joven campesina indígena evangélica no es lo mismo que mujer madura blanca urbana universitaria y atea. Al diferenciar entre distintas construcciones de la identidad, es posible ver que en ciertos momentos unas son más significativas que otras. (*Feminismo* 26)

⁵ Maids, nannies and factory workers.

It is completely legitimate to recognize identity but, taking into account the multiplicity of discourses and the power relationships at play. Additionally, there are no monolithic identities but rather identities are multiple and fragmented. Singular identities are always mythical constructions. “Woman” does not exist; such identity is mixed with others: a young indigenous and evangelical woman from the countryside is not the same as a mature, white, university graduate, atheist woman from the city. When we differentiate between different identity constructions it is possible to see why, in certain moments, there are some more significant than others.

This project seeks to recognize a variety of female experiences that have often been overlooked.

Even though issues of class and gender have been widely discussed since the second part of the 20th Century in the U.S. context, such has not been the case in Mexico. Chicana scholars such as Mary Romero, and Gloria Anzaldúa, among many others, are greatly influential in the contemporary debates on inclusive feminism. Being that Mexico is a culturally diverse country, it is essential that a space exist for the acceptance and appreciation of the diversity of female experiences. In this work I look at the representations of working-class women in the contemporary Mexican context.

Chapter 2, “*Sirvientas, Patronas*, and Housework: The Place of Domestic Work in Mexican Culture,” looks at the relationships between women of opposing social strata in texts by well-known Mexican writers such as Rosario Castellanos, Elena Poniatowska, Juan García Ponce, Laura Esquivel, Sara Sefchovich, Sabina Berman, and Carlos Fuentes, and Chicana writer Alicia Gaspar de Alba. *Sirvientas* proposes a textual analysis to explore the complexity of the

power relationship between employer and employee in everyday interactions. In his “The Subject and Power,” Michel Foucault

asserts that power cannot be exercised separate from freedom:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized. Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains. (In this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint.) [790]

Power exists between employer and employee since the latter is a free subject. Her work is one that she can leave if she desires, and she is compensated for it. The working woman is afforded all of the liberties available to any citizen. Therefore, a relationship of power can occur. This is not to suggest, however, that the power is shared. Although the maid is a free subject, her economic needs might be fulfilled at the cost of her freedom.

Chapter 3, “Substitute Motherhood: Nannies in Mexican Culture,” explores the ultimately failed mothering of upper-class children by working-class women. In works such as *Balún Canán*, *La “Flor de Lis,”* and *Como agua para chocolate*, the upper-class mothers are replaced by working-class nannies who become the temporary substitute mothers to the wealthy children.

Chapter 4, “The Borders of Crime and Gender in *Maquiladora* Cultural Production,” looks at the “punishment” to which *maquiladora* workers are subject to for altering the patriarchal order of society. Specifically, I look at texts that deal directly with the workplace such as Sabina Berman’s *Backyard*, Carlos Fuentes’ “Malitzin de las maquilas,” and Alicia

Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood*. By looking at the regulations of the workplace, I seek to study the relationships of power that Foucault talks about when he discusses the "blocks" that constitute regular and concerted systems:

The activity which ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behavior is developed there by means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the "value" of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by the means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy). ("The Subject" 787)

Maquiladoras, if we follow Foucault's premise, work much as an educational institution in that they are structures with well-defined functions that ensure control of the workers.

The question of power dynamics is at the center of a discussion of inter-class relationships such as the present one. Power does not exist neither in a concentrated nor diffused form as is assumed, but rather:

Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures. This is also means that power is not a function of consent. In itself it is not a renunciation of freedom, a transference of rights, the power of each and all delegated to a few (which does not prevent the possibility that consent may be a condition for the existence or the maintenance of power); the relationship of power can be the result of a prior or permanent consent, but it is not by nature the manifestation of a consensus. (Foucault "The Subject" 788)

If power can only exist when executed and as a result of prior consent, then it should be assumed that working-class women have given their consent for others to exert power over them. This consent, however, is not a conscious “consent” but rather the result of a political structure that expects passivity.

With regard to the analysis of power relationships, Michel Foucault states that it is necessary for societies to investigate what forms them, what makes them strong as well as the conditions necessary to transform or abolish them as it is not possible for any given society not to have them:

For to say that there cannot be a society without power relations is not to say either that those which are established are necessary or, in any case, that power constitutes a fatality at the heart of societies, such that it cannot be undermined. Instead, I would say that the analysis, elaboration, and bringing into question of power relations and the “agonism”⁶ between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence. (“The Subject” 791-92)

In all societies, hence, the questioning of power relationships is a constant task.

In order for power relationships to exist, there must be two elements. Namely, “that ‘the other’ (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results and possible inventions may open up” (Foucault “The Subject” 789).

While it is clear that the power balance favors the upper-class women analyzed in this text, a look at the concept of power relations is worth taking. Foucault proposes a “new economy of power relations.” In order to understand the nature of power relations he suggests

⁶ Translator Leslie Sawyer explains that Foucault's neologism comes from the Greek word for “combat.”

that we “should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations” (“The Subject” 780). Furthermore, his proposal takes as starting point oppositions such as the opposition to the power of men over women, of parents over children, among others.

His proposal,

[...] consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. (“The Subject” 780)

Furthermore, he stresses the importance of defining what the anti-authority struggles have in common. According to Foucault, these struggles are not exclusive to any particular country or type of government; their aim is the power effects as such; and they are “immediate” struggles:

In such struggles people criticize instances of power which are the closest to them, those which exercise their actions on individuals. They do not look for the “chief enemy” but for the immediate enemy. Nor do they expect to find a solution to their problem at a future date (that is, liberations, revolution, end of class struggle). In comparison with a theoretical scale of explanations or a revolutionary order which polarized the historian, they are anarchistic struggles. (“The Subject” 780)

When working-class women show signs of resistance against the power of their upper-class counterparts, they are, in fact, rebelling against the most immediate form of control over them.

CHAPTER 2

SIRVIENTAS, PATRONAS, AND HOUSEWORK: PAID DOMESTIC WORK IN MEXICAN CULTURE

Los pobres son simplemente “los otros”, la carne de cañón, los pelados, los perros que se nos meten entre las piernas, los condenados de antemano, los indios, la plebe, el coro oscuro y mugriento de los esclavos, “el servicio”.
--Elena Poniatowska

In the margins of the texts and the margins of the culture the maids and other minor characters constitute a particularly relevant case for studying patterns of cultural hatred and have been studied insufficiently to date.
--Miriam Balboa Echeverría

Domestic service is a unique social setting in which to explore relationships between women. Rarely in our society do women (or men) from different social, economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds interact in an informal and intimate setting. The employer's home, in which domestics and employers interact brings several important factors to bear simultaneously: shared gender, interracial and interclass oppression, and location within women's primary unrecognized workplace- the household.
--Mary Romero

2.1 The Place of Domestic Work in Mexican Culture

The place of housework in Mexican culture and its implications for upper and upper-middle class, and working-class women as well as the interactions between employers and employees in works of contemporary Mexican fiction are the focus of this chapter. In her ground-breaking *Maid in the U.S.A.*, Mary Romero examines the position of the maid within American society. Her discussion questions progressive feminists who pay little attention to the women who clean their houses, allowing the former to carry out their professional responsibilities. Housework, according to Romero, only concerned early feminists when it pertained to women as unpaid housewives (127). The irony of middle-class “women's liberation,” Romero argues, lies in the experience of paid domestic servants. Middle-class

women hire working-class women to be able to fulfill their ambitions while, at the same time, passing on the tediousness of housework to their employees. Maids perform not only physical housework; however, their work also includes other chores such as child care and house maintenance. Since most “contracts” are made by verbal agreements, female employers subject domestic workers to tasks they did not originally agree to perform. Besides freeing the employer from the drudgery of housework, Romero states that, in the past, maids were also considered a sign of status (129). More importantly, in the power dynamics between employer and employee, since employers do not involve their husbands/partners in the responsibility of keeping a house, they effectively support and reproduce sexist behavior when dealing with their domestic employees:

Domestic service reveals the contradiction in a feminism that pushed for women’s involvement outside the home, yet failed to make men take responsibility for household labor. Employed middle- and upper-middle class women escaped the double day syndrome by hiring poor women of color to perform housework and child care, and this was characterized as progress. Some feminists defined domestic service as progressive because traditional women’s work moved into the labor market and became paid work. However, this definition neglects the inescapable fact that when women hire other women at low wages to do housework, both employees and employers remain women. (128)

Early feminists look to housework as the main form of oppression for women, but ignored the fact that for some women performing housework was a way of making a living. While Romero discusses the dynamics of power, that involve gender, class, and race, in domestic service in the United States between Euro-American women and women of color, her argument can be applied

to the Mexican context as well. Although most working-class *mestizos* make up the majority of Mexico's population it is no secret that most upper-class Mexicans descend from European families. Much like in the United States, then, women of European descent hire women of color to provide domestic services.

This chapter analyzes the texts of contemporary Mexican women writers such as Elena Poniatowska, Rosario Castellanos, Sara Sefchovich, and Elena Garro as well as in a text by Juan García Ponce to determine the role the maids play in the lives of upper-class Mexican women. I examine the ways in which their upper-class counterparts oppress maids or domestic workers, and how such oppression signals a blind spot in feminism.

It is the relationships between women of contrasting socioeconomic classes that I seek to explore in the text studied on this chapter. On one hand, I look at the maids' limited "power" due to their marginal status. On the other hand, however, literature provides examples in which the maids are key characters in the lives of their privileged counterparts. The fact that the *patronas* (bosses) studied depend on their *muchachas*⁷ not only for manual labor but also for companionship and emotional support, signals the maids' "power" within systems that oppresses them. Evidently, this "power" displayed by the maids is only a sign of resistance and not to be taken as a sign that someone in a subordinate position can actually have true power.

In 1981 Elena Poniatowska wrote the introduction to *Se necesita muchacha*, a book of testimonies by domestic workers in Peru most of which are of indigenous descent. Poniatowska's introduction to Ana Gutiérrez's book shows her concern with the unprivileged situation of the maids. While addressing the negative experiences brought up by women in the

⁷ *Muchacha* is the Spanish word for "young woman." Although many domestic servants are, in fact, young, such age group is not exclusive of older age groups. However, the term is used to signal the childish way in which maids are characterized.

book, Poniatowska transfers their concerns to the Mexican context utilizing both real experiences of domestic workers and literary examples.

Mexican society, Poniatowska explains, has alienated the vast majority of Mexicans, who happen to be the poor, while serving the interest of the minority wealthy ones. Moreover, the poor, who work serving the upper-class, are subjected to long shifts, sexual harassment and minimal pay, among other oppressive practices either directly by their bosses or indirectly by the structure of their society. Modern life in the city is designed for those few who can afford to have extravagant taste while ignoring the rest of the population. In the case of the maids, their place in the city is that of an invisible being. They are there to serve, but not to be seen.

Poor working women face fear, among many other problems. Poniatowska argues that fear takes hold of the maids once they are faced with a different reality than that of their home communities. In their job as servants, for example, they encounter many challenges when having to operate household equipment. Everything is new to them and they must adapt to their new environment quickly. However, the fear to objects and people stays with them. As Poniatowska points out in *Se necesita muchacha*: “Incluso si el miedo yace en estado latente de modo que sólo se resiente en ocasiones como sufrimiento, permanece dentro del hombre: esta enfermedad equivale a una parálisis del alma” (Even if fear is latent, and it is felt only in moments of sorrow, it stays inside the human being: this illness is equivalent to soul paralysis) [10]. Besides the fear instigated on them which they eventually internalize, and their obvious alienation from society, maids must face their *desarraigo* from their native community and culture. Based on Poniatowska’s assertions, I understand *desarraigo* to be a form of deep detachment not only from the native land itself, but also from customs, and traditional community values.

Even though the forced exile and the loss of cultural and emotional connections to their community is a problematic idea because it implies that romanticized rural life is far better than life in the “dehumanized” city, it is important to recognize that their new environment does affect their identity:

El problema más grave de las sirvientas es el del desarraigo. En la ciudad, al contacto de costumbres y tradiciones (si así pueden llamarse las formas impuestas por la patrona que las encasilla) les son cercenadas sus raíces o ellas mismas las van arrancando de tajo, rompiéndoles en un proceso cuyo dolor viene más tarde, ya que en el momento mismo la rapidez del cambio impide tener conciencia de él. (*Se necesita* Poniatowska 12)

The maids’ most severe problem is that of detachment. In the city, coming in contact with customs and traditions (if those imposed by her boss can be called like that), their roots are taken away or they themselves get rid of them completely. The pain of the process comes later because the fast pace of it prevents them from being aware of such loss.

While they were treated with respect in their native communities because they were part of a family, in the city they have little visibility and respect in addition to the burden of adapting to a completely new way of life.

Alongside her discussion of the “loss” of identity suffered by rural women working in the city as domestic servants, Poniatowska acknowledges the problems faced by Mexican agricultural workers who can no longer produce because of the disadvantaged state of their lands: “Si uno quisiera barbechar estas tierras, con agarrar un gato y jalarlo por la cola bastaría.

Así la arañó el viento. Son infinitas las tierras que están erosionadas. Por eso sus habitantes las abandonan a la hora de las tolvaneras, y las mujeres vienen a meterse de sirvientas en la casa de los ricos” (If one wanted to sow these lands, one could simple use a cat and drag him by his tail. That is how the wind scratched them. There are endless pieces of land that have been wearing away. That is why their people abandon them when the winds come, and the women come to work as maids in the houses of the rich men) [*Se necesita* 30]. Nowadays, such poor working conditions, combined with fierce competition from foreign growers, have forced rural migration to cities within Mexico or even outside the country.

Although, in the United States, Chicana/Latina and African American feminists openly discuss issues of class and the implications of being a working-class woman, it is important to note that some white critics in the past few years have thoroughly researched the life quality of women who earn a living serving others. In *Global Woman*, a study on the working and living situation of domestic workers, nannies, and prostitutes in the age of globalization, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild state that the many women from developing countries that migrate to developed economies for employment fill spaces that were traditionally occupied by housewives. Because of the work of maids and nannies at home, women from the “First World” can establish themselves professionally. Once released from household responsibilities, professional women enjoy greater freedom to grow in the world of remunerated work outside the home. Their success in the world of work depends, in large part, in their ability to hire someone to take over their domestic responsibilities. As Russell Hochschild affirms:

Women who want to succeed in a professional or managerial job in the First World thus face strong pressures at work. Most careers are still based on a well-known (male) pattern: doing professional work, competing with fellow

professionals, getting credit for work, building a reputation, doing it while you are young, hoarding scarce time, and minimizing family work by finding someone else to do it. In the past, the professional was a man; the “someone else” was his wife. (20)

Domestic work, traditionally understood as woman’s responsibility, becomes both a liberating and oppressing tool for women. On the one hand, not having to deal with the daily household chores, women in the upper end of the social scale can easily enter the “masculine” world of work. On the other hand, when the maids perform domestic work, they take the place of the traditional housewife. Even though it is true that their work is compensated, it is far from providing the same level of professional and economic satisfaction that non-manual labor offers. In many developed economies that “someone else” of which Russell Hochschild speaks is the maid who, besides from keeping a house, becomes, in many occasions, the provider who fulfills the emotional needs of the family. Even if Mexico does not fit in the definition of the “First World” that Ehrenreich and Russell Hochschild discuss, the truth is that many professional women work outside the home and use the services of domestic servants.

2.2 The Irony of Feminism

While Mexican women in general have had significant gains in areas such as the political, financial, and social, women in lower end of the socioeconomic ladder have often been ignored by women who are otherwise progressive. Emily Hicks illustrates this idea in the epilogue to her *Border Writing*: the poem about a feminist and her maid reads:

Anglo monocultural feminist is ends discussion:

Well, I’ve got go to my Women’s Studies class.

Don’t forget to feed the baby vegetables for lunch.

I'll be back around 3:00.

Oh, and by the way,

if you want to speak Spanish to the baby, go ahead.

We live so near the border, he may as well be bilingual.

You do speak Spanish, don't you?

Chicana multicultural nonfeminist maid says:

Sí, señora.

Anglo monocultural feminist is suddenly depressed; she thinks to herself:

"Every once in a while I feel really kind of guilty

about having a maid

I guess if I really believed in my feminism, I wouldn't..." (122)

Although the conversation in Hick's poem takes place near the Mexico- U.S. border and is between a European American feminist and her Chicana maid, such class tensions are deeply imbedded in Mexican culture as well. Elena Poniatowska exemplifies such anxiety within Mexican feminists, like herself, when she talks about the irony of feminism with regards to domestic work, and recognizes that she herself must hire the help of a woman to do housework in order for her to continue writing and publishing:

Si ella es profesora universitaria, ¿cómo va barrer el zaguán? Surge la famosa división entre académicos y manuales: el cerebro y las manos. La patrona tiene otro destino, ha cultivado el cerebro, lo ha alimentado, es más, lo ha costado el Estado. Está muy bien que otro ser humano, sin destino, ni oficio ni beneficio: la criada pues, haga lo que a ella le quitaría un tiempo infinito y valiosísimo. Por eso alguien escobetea, vierte detergente y pone a blanquear, mientras otro

investiga, escribe y da a la publicación. Mientras yo escribo, María en la cocina, calienta la leche para darles de desayunar a mis hijos. (*Se necesita* 54)

If she is a university professor, why would she clean the entrance to her house?

The famous division between academics and manual laborers comes up: brain versus manual labor. The mistress has a different fate, she has cultivated her brain, she had fed it, what's more, the State has financed it. It is fine that other human being, without direction, without a profession or mission in life, the maid, that is, do what would rob the academic of her precious time. That is why someone cleans the floors, pours the detergent, and uses the bleach, while another human being does research, writes, and publishes. While I write, María, in the kitchen, warms up the milk to feed breakfast to my children.

Both Hicks, in the border context, and Poniatowska, in the Mexican context, acknowledge the tension stemming from being a feminist while hiring the services of another woman to take over their housework in order for them to have the time necessary to develop as scholars and writers.

2.3 Domestic Work and Women

Before discussing the complex nature of the relationship between *patronas*, *sirvientas*, and housework, I would like to discuss the role of housework in the representation of upper- and upper-middle class housewives. I seek to exemplify the radically different nature of housework when it is done for pay then when it is done without it.

Sara Sefchovich's *La señora de los sueños* offers a good example of the difference between domestic work as something done out of economic need and that which is performed by a woman of upper-middle-class status. In this novel, Sefchovich tells the story in which the

protagonist affirms her subjectivity by way of romance novel reading. Ana Fernández, the protagonist, lives trapped in a patriarchal system that only offers her the monotony of domestic work and her role as the perfect wife and mother whose mission in life is to serve her family at the cost of sacrificing her own individuality and personal growth.

The role of women in patriarchal societies has been traditionally reserved for the private sphere. In literature, therefore, the images of women are limited, mainly, to the domestic sphere. In the context of the Latin American culture, it is not particularly common to find representations of women in positions of power in the public sphere. Nevertheless, contemporary women writers demonstrate a clear attempt to break away from the rigid patriarchal structures thus facilitating their female characters' entrance in spaces previously restricted to them. Such writers use mechanisms as diverse as the intellectualization of "feminine" spaces, women's travels, and the creation of alternative spaces, among others. Sara Sefchovich's *La señora de los sueños* creates alternative spaces in order to liberate her protagonist from the monotony of the domestic realm.

Sara Sefchovich belongs to a generation of contemporary Mexican women writers who show a clear commitment to the representation of women in society. In her work, both sociological and fictional, she engages in discussions that seek to revise the traditional role of women in Mexican society. Her novels have had great commercial success and quickly become *bestsellers*. The fact that her novels are sold in large numbers has called for the questioning of the literary value of her work by some critics, as Elvira Sánchez-Blake states:

En el debate de la literatura "light" versus literatura "difícil", la prosa de Sefchovich, a pesar de ser sencilla y dirigida a un público llano, esconde tras su aparente sencillez una gran metáfora que puede o no ser develada por el lector sin

desmerecer en la lectura. La intención⁸ de Sefchovich es propiciar la lectura entre las mujeres, con la convicción de que éstas son más asiduas lectoras que los hombres. (Sánchez-Blake 108)

In the discussion of “light” literature versus “difficult” literature, Sefchovich’s prose, in spite being simple and directed to an uncomplicated public, hides a great metaphor behind its apparent simplicity. Such metaphor can or not to be revealed by the reader without lowering its literary value. Sefchovich’s intention is to encourage reading among women as she is convinced that women more avid readers than men.

Sefchovich’s readers can clearly see the complexity of which Sanchez-Blake speaks in the structures of her novels: they are always fragmented as they imply double realities in the lives of her characters.

In *Demasiado amor*, the writer portrays the sexual liberation of Beatriz, the main character, through several trips to the Mexican province (*provincia*). After leaving behind the daily routine of her life as a secretary, and reviving her formerly non-existent romantic and sexual life, Beatriz establishes herself as a desiring subject who carries out her fantasies without being repressed by traditional values. If in her first novel (*Demasiado amor*), Sefchovich uses travels and sexuality as self-discovery tools, in her *La señora de los sueños* the writer reiterates the travel *motif* only this time the travels are, in addition to being many and diverse, intangible.

La señora de los sueños presents the story of a traditional upper middle-class Mexican family made up of the typical bureaucrat who spends his hours at the office (the father), a young

⁸ Although obviously difficult to determine the writer’s intentions, the critic states that Sefchovich, in private conversation, confirmed such intention.

woman who dreams about a brilliant marriage (the daughter), an adolescent discovering the world (the son), and a woman who is the “perfect wife.” The latter’s life, however, revolves around pleasing her family even at the cost of her own pleasure.

After twenty years of marriage Ana Fernández, the traditional wife, realizes that life in a perfectly ordered world does not satisfy her. While her husband and her children have lives outside the home, Ana, as good mother and wife, works hard in her endless domestic tasks as one of her own monologues demonstrates:

Ya puse la lavadora, ya preparé la salsa, ya sacudí el escritorio, ya cosí el botón, ya doblé las camisa, el almidón está listo, los calcetines tiene su par, el pan de nuez crece en el horno, las verduras bien lavadas y desinfectadas esperan en el refrigerador, ya llevé las tarjetas de navidad al correo, ya hablé por teléfono para saludar a mi suegra, ya hice una larguísima cola para pagar la luz y otra para cobrar el cheque en el banco, ya recogí el traje de la tintorería y la plancha de la compostura, ya conseguí plomero y un cerrajero, ya compré los refrescos y piqué la cebolla, ya hice esto y lo otro, ya hice todo lo que tenía que hacer, esta soy yo y esta es mi vida, día a día, desde hace casi veinte años. (Sefchovich 15)

I already started the washing machine, I prepared the *salsa*, I clean up the desk, I sewed the button, I folded the shirt, prepared the starch for ironing, I put the socks with their pairs, the nut bread bakes in the oven, the vegetables are washed and disinfected as they wait in the refrigerator, I mailed the Christmas cards, I spoke to my mother-in-law over the phone to see how she was doing, I stood in a very long line to pay the electricity and in another to cash the check at the bank, I

picked up the suit from the dry cleaners and the iron from the repair shop, I found a plumber and a locksmith, I bought the sodas and I chopped the onion, I did this and the other, I did everything I had to do, this is who I am and this is my life, day after day, for almost twenty years.

Wanting to become a good “master” of her house (*ama de casa*), Ana neglected herself from having a life outside her domestic responsibilities while letting such labor define her as an individual. Throughout the years she saw her children grow up and her husband grow a belly while she became the “perfect Mexican mother” (*madrecita mexicana*).

In her *El eterno femenino* Rosario Castellanos questions the archetype of the *madrecita mexicana* by way of her character Lupita. Lupita is presented in the play as a single character representing Mexican women in a variety of social contexts. Lupita, then, is a young woman about to become married, the typical Mexican mother, a revolutionary, and an academic among others. Nevertheless, her role as wife and mother, her confirmation as a heteronormative being, is what defines her as a woman. Once Lupita enters the normative space of heterosexual married life, her representation as a typical housewife begins immediately. Such representation spans from many stages of her life ranging from a young pregnant woman to an old woman that is venerated for her “role” as a good Mexican mother. The notion that the figure mother is a supreme being in Mexican works both to “mythify” and to oppress her. On one hand, because of the admiration professed to her, she is placed in an “altar.” The mother, just like Ana Fernández, is the sole ruler in her “kingdom” (her house). On the other hand, such limited agency is still confined to the highly devaluated domestic realm.

Exploring the influence of women in both the public and private spheres, Judith Lowder Newton examines conduct treatises for upper-class women in 18th Century England. Such treatises

sought to establish the role of women in society as seen by men. Although Lowder Newton finds that the treaties demonstrate the influence of women in society, she quickly points out that such influence was limited to the domestic sphere (882). Despite the perceptions about their “nature,” women’s desire for power in and out of the domestic sphere was clearly reflected in the literature produced at the same time that the treaties were being published, thus challenging the assumptions made about women’s characters. Although Lowder Newton’s study is spatially and temporally far from Mexican women, their lives are not that different from the English women in her study. Even when nowadays the number of women entering the labor force is growing, their lives are still defined by their domestic work and not for their paid labor outside the house.

While it can be argued that women demonstrate their agency when deciding to stay home and not work outside the house (as in the case of upper middle-class Ana Fernández), it is important to understand that such agency is limited to domestic tasks. Ana’s life is reduced to her domestic “kingdom” and as the queen she is the “patrona de la licuadora, de la ropa sucia, de los sartenes y la plancha” (master of the blender, the dirty clothes, the pots and pans, and the iron) [Sefchovich 14]. Such monotonous life, however, is broken when Ana discovers the joy of reading. Reading novels presents the possibility of escaping her life and create an alternate “reality” that ultimately results in her own growth as an individual.

After years of pleasing others, Ana decides to please herself through reading and to lose herself by doing so. By way of multiple stories, she can fulfill fantasies that would be otherwise impossible for her to pursue. In her fantasies, Ana becomes an Arab slave, a Russian princess, a Cuban revolutionary, and an American prostitute, among other characters. Her domestic reality disappears in the moments devoted to her readings. It is through Ana’s stories that Sara Sefchovich presents the act of reading as challenge to the patriarchal order. Novel-reading is a

key element in feminine self-pleasure. The monotony of marriage and motherhood is no longer present in the alternative world that fiction represents for Ana. Her husband's non-existent sexual desire and her "objectivization" on the part of her children find in the novels the completely opposite answer. In her novels it is Ana who becomes the protagonist of her life and not a mere object for the pleasure of other. As Janice Radway states when discussing romance novels in her "Reading the Romance:"

Romance reading supplements the avenues traditionally open to women for emotional gratification by supplying them vicariously with the attention and nurturance they do not get enough of in the round of day-to-day existence. It counter-values because the story opposes the female values of love and personal interaction to the male values of competition and public achievement and, at least in ideal romances, demonstrates the triumph of the former over the latter.

(Radway 1044)

Following Radway's logic, the novels read by Ana provide her with the things that her marriage fails to offer.

Ana's pleasure found in reading challenges patriarchal order because it threatens the typical categories in a "perfect" family when, suddenly, the loving wife and mother disappears. When reading becomes her first priority, her husband feels betrayed and her children bitterly complain about the change in their mother. Her daughter criticizes harshly for not working in the house anymore: "Pensé en mi hermano y en mí toda la mañana en la escuela, luego en el inglés, en el gimnasio o haciendo las tareas y en mi pobre papá trabajando en su oficina para que tengamos una sirvienta que hace todo mientras ella duerme, muy cómoda, sin hacer nada. Y pues, la verdad, me dio coraje, mucho coraje (I thought about my brother and I the whole

morning at school, then to English lessons, at the gym or doing homework, and I thought about my poor father working in his office so that we can have a maid that does all the work while she sleeps, very comfortable, not doing anything) [Sefchovich 240]. Ana's unexpected change of conduct creates resentment in her children as they no longer have the "perfect" mother to keep their house. Moreover, such change soon begins to be taken as a sign of madness.

In their *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar discuss the anxiety of authorship and the fact that women who wrote were considered mad for deviating from the norm that indicated that the place of women was in the house performing her traditional duties with the only objective of pleasing their husbands and children. When such expectations were not fulfilled, women were considered a danger to heterosexual normativity. Thus when women reaffirm their subjectivities at the cost of "sacrificing" their traditional performances, they are considered "mad." Much in the same way in which the English women writers studied by Gilbert and Gubar, Ana Fernández is accused of being a deviant when trying to fulfill her own satisfaction.

Ana's novels function as alternative spaces in which to carry out all the fantasies that society and her "perfect" marriage would not afford. Through her imaginary travels to remote times and places, Ana gets out of her limited domestic space to explore not only places but situations over which she has absolute power even if only temporarily. However, since she does not "author" those imaginary scenarios, her escape is not autonomous. About Ana's escape through reading, Debra Castillo writes:

Ana Fernández's middle-class existence is a blank space played out in the never-ending cycle of housework and cooking. Her real life is no life at all; lost among the objects she cares for and reduced to an insignificant cog in her well-

functioning household, she desires liberation and finds temporary escape through reading popular fictions. The successive rebellions are always truncated, and each chapter returns her to the family home, the angry husband, the bemused children. (Castillo 153)

In “Los suspiros solitarios,” for example, Ana becomes an aristocratic Argentine woman that, moved by her intellectual curiosity, decides to get away from her family knowing that if she stays she will lead a monotonous life trapped in an arranged marriage. She travels to Galápagos Island and she settles there leading a solitary life completely devoted to scientific research. She meets Charles Darwin and quickly develops a professional and platonic relationship with him. This chapter of *La señora de los sueños* is particularly significant as Ana completely crosses the feminine-masculine border. Since the character in her novel-fantasy knows that the life alternatives for a woman are extremely limited, she decides to disguise herself as a man and live like one, as she herself states:

[...] yo fungía como su secretario, así en masculino, porque para poder vivir como me gusta y hacer lo que quiero, siempre visto de hombre y todos creen que lo soy, pues ¿acaso se puede ser mujer y dedicarse a la ciencia y vivir en este lugar tan apartado, completamente sola? Imposible, no son tiempos para eso, el mundo aún está muy atrasado. (Sefchovich 201)

[...] I acted as his [male] secretary, like that in masculine, because, in order to live the way I like and want to live, I always dress as a man and everyone thinks that I am a man. Is it possible to be a woman and devote oneself to science and live in

this remote place completely alone? Impossible, it is not the time for that, the world is still behind

Darwin's secretary concludes that only being a man can one enter intellectual terrains without being labeled "mad." Despite her discovery, she decides to conform to her "biological reality" as a woman and she lets Darwin claim her scientific discoveries who, she says, would be taken seriously.

With each of the novels read Ana transports herself to worlds far from her own reality while, at the same time, claims a creative space for herself. However, Ana's creative fantasies result in her experiencing anxiety and creating anxiety for her family. That is, authorship anxiety of which Gilbert and Gubar write becomes "reader anxiety" in Ana's life. Nevertheless, her unfulfilled married life is ameliorated by the stories she immerses herself in. As Janice Radway states: "Interstices still exist within the social fabric where opposition is carried on by people who are not satisfied by their place within it or by the restricted material and emotional rewards that accompany it. They therefore attempt to imagine a more perfect social state as a way of countering despair." (Radway 1048)

Ana's alternative reality allows her to achieve pleasure. Such alternative reality, although liberating, presents itself as problematic. On one hand, the fantasies created by Ana's novels are still confined to the private space of the house/imagination. When reading she establishes herself as an anxious agent, but she always must go back to the responsibility of her "kingdom." While the novel's ending shows that Ana has finally liberated herself from her role as a housewife by starting her own business, her business only replicates her domestic work: she bakes and sells cakes. On the other hand, her social status, upper middle-class, affords her access to books and to a certain amount of time to enjoy them. Working-class women lives', conversely, are

extremely different to the one presented in *La señora de los sueños*. For women who must contribute to their family's economy by working outside the house or who are the head of household, there is only limited time or funds for anything outside work. Nevertheless, Sara Sefchovich's text demonstrates that the domestic sphere creates a void in feminine subjectivities when there is no creative outlet, and that role expectations can and should be questioned in order for women to establish themselves as agents.

2.4 The Maid in Mexican Culture

In analyzing the structure of the Mexican upper-middle-class families in Mexican society, Rosario Castellanos states that it is formed by the wife, the husband, the children and the servants. The wife, at the center of the familial nucleus, must tolerate the husband's moods and attitude and be loving and patient with her children. With her maid, however, the former can easily express her dismay at the latter's many "faults." In an article published in Mexico City's *Excelsior* in 1969, Castellanos tells of her desire to become part of the "elite" circle of married women if only to participate in their conversations about their domestic life. Unwilling to talk negatively about their husbands and children, she discovered, they would have a lot to say about their maids' personality traits:

Donde el espíritu podía desahogarse con toda la acerbidad que no consiente el respeto al cónyuge ni el amor a la prole era con la servidumbre. ¡Qué lucidez para captar sus fallas! ¡Qué minuciosidad para describirlos! ¡Qué engolosinamiento para narrar las anécdotas inagotables!

El catálogo es variado. Las criadas son perezosas, desaprensivas, ingratas, mentirosas, ladronas, malmodientes, sucias, etcétera. Pero fundamentalmente, tontas. Sin excepción. La que es lo bastante lista – es ley natural – no es criada.

Está en la fábrica, en el prostíbulo, en la casa chica como dueña, en la antesala de los productores de cine, radio y televisión. (“De los quehaceres” 259)

Where the spirit could relieve itself with the bitterness that does not support the respect for the husband or the love for the children was with the servants. What intelligence to recognize their faults! What a detailed description of them! What joy to tell endless anecdotes!

The catalog is varied. The maids are lazy, insensitive, ungrateful, liars, thieves, moody, dirty, etcetera. But, more than anything, they are stupid: no exceptions. She who is smart—is the natural law—is not a maid.

She works at the factory, at the brothel, she is the owner of the *casa chica*, or she works with film, radio and television producers.

Although the tone in Castellanos’ article is sarcastic, it does call attention to the way the figure of the maid and her work are seen in the Mexican cultural imaginary. In this view, the maid is nothing more than a mere object that performs mechanical functions without using her intellect. Her many domestic duties cause her intelligence to become extinct. Castellanos’ hypothesis is that: “la índole del trabajo doméstico es tal que atrofia la inteligencia de quien lo lleva a cabo y es susceptible de conducirla a su total extinción” (the nature of work is such that it damages the intelligence of she who performs it, and it is susceptible to lead to its total extinction) [259].

Therefore, maids are seen as women who deserve the kind of job they perform because of their lack of intelligence. After all, if they were smarter they would not be cleaning after someone else and performing endless routine tasks, but they would be the ones giving orders and living comfortably.

The unsafe working conditions and the physical and psychological abuse to which poor young women are subjected are at the core of Rosario Castellanos' short story "Modesta Gómez" included in her *Ciudad Real*. Moreover, the writer demonstrates the limited possibilities not only for social advancement, but for mere survival that poor working women face. Modesta Gómez serves as an example for the work and life experiences of many young women from rural, poor families.

Castellanos' story takes place in her native state of Chiapas and it starts in the occasion of Modesta Gómez's first day as an *atajadora*.⁹ While getting ready for her new job, Modesta recalls the events that lead her to her current life. As a child, Modesta was placed in the house of the Ochoas to work as a *cargadora*. Although they were both the same age, she was given the task of caring for and entertaining the family's youngest son, Jorgito. Modesta remembers how her being placed in that house was a relief for her family who had one less mouth to feed. Modesta was very impressed with the Ochoas' house and even thought about it as being her own. As they were growing up, Modesta and Jorgito shared play time together and even got sick at the same time. Such intimacy was not well taken by Jorgito's mother, Romelia, who tried to place limits in the *cargadora* and her son's personal treatment and time spent together. As time passed by, Modesta became a teenager who attracted attention from the town's men. At times, she dreamt of being legally married to a working man, and at other times she thought of the possibility of spending time working at a brothel before becoming the lover of a man who would help her establish her own small business. Nonetheless, Modesta saw her future as a bright one. Her dreams ended when Jorgito sexually abused her and she became pregnant with his son

⁹ *Atajadoras* were women who stopped indigenous merchants on their way to the cities to sell their goods. These women would appropriate the merchants' goods using physical force and verbal threats.

because, as Poniatowska notes, motherhood for maids that go experience abuse, is far from being the joyful event it often is for their upper-class counterparts:

El “feliz alumbramiento” de las burguesas, son su moño azul o rosa según el producto que parieron, anunciándolo en la puerta de la recámara, se convierte en un acontecimiento sórdido. Para poderlas sacar del pabellón de maternidad del Hospital General hay que donar sangre o cincuenta pesos o una canastilla-ropón. Si no hay un solo familiar que done sangre, la “enferma” no tiene derecho a visita. (Poniatowska 18)

The “happy arrival” of the bourgeoisies, with their pink or blue ribbon, according to the sex of the baby, announcing it on the door, becomes a sordid event. To be released from the public hospital someone must donate blood, fifty pesos or a baby basket. If there aren’t any relatives to donate blood, the “sick woman” is not allowed to have any visitor’s

In Modesta’s case, her pregnancy ends up in her being fired from her job at the Ochoas. Eventually, Modesta meets Alberto who accepts her despite being an unmarried mother. Her life with Alberto, however, is not easy as he drinks heavily, but Modesta enjoys the fact that she is a legally married woman.

Given her limited possibilities after her husband’s death, and with three children to support, Modesta must look for ways to supplement the small income she makes at the local meat market. Her new job puts her in direct conflict with disadvantaged women just like her. While Modesta was a maid she had no choice but to obey her mistress and to quietly accept Jorgito’s sexual abuse. Once she is married and acquires the social status of a legally married

woman, her position within her community changes. What's more important: no longer being a servant and after having endure multiple abuses and humiliation, Modesta takes her rage out on a woman with far less prestige in society: an indigenous woman. Modesta is given the task of seizing the goods of the young woman who tries to escape the group of *atajadoras*, and she reacts instinctively:

De un modo automático, lo mismo que un animal mucho tiempo adiestrado en la persecución, Modesta se lanzó hacia la fugitiva. Al darle alcance la asió de la falda y ambas rodaron por tierra. Modesta luchó hasta quedar encima de la otra. Le jaló las trenzas, le golpeó las mejillas, le clavó las uñas en las orejas. ¡Más fuerte! ¡Más fuerte! (73)

In an automated manner, much like an animal trained in persecution, Modesta run towards the fugitive. When she reached her, she grabbed her by her skirt and both rolled in the dirt. Modesta struggled until she position herself on top of the other one. She pulled her braids, she hit her in the cheeks, she sunk in her nails in her ears. Harder! Harder!

Modesta's reaction when attacking the young indigenous woman, points to how, because of the social structure at play, two women who suffer from discrimination and who must struggle for survival, are pitted against each other. These two women, who share similar experiences of oppression, must fight each other to either make a living or to defend what is rightfully theirs. In the case of Modesta, her reaction towards her indigenous counterpart shows how societal norms have made her replicate the structure of power that she learned from her former *patrona*.

-¡India desgraciada, me lo tenés que pagar todo junto!

La india se retorció de dolor; diez hillillos de sangre le escurrieron de los lóbulos hasta la nuca.

-Ya no, marchanta, ya no...

Enardecida, acezante Modesta se aferraba a su víctima. No quiso soltarla ni cuando le entregó el chamarro de lana que traía escondido. Tuvo que intervenir otra atajadora. (74)

-You dirty Indian, you will pay for everything!

The indigenous woman cried of pain. Ten little threads of blood ran from her ears to her nape.

-No more, madam, no more...

Furious, threatening, Modesta held on to her victim. She did not want to let her go even when the woman gave her the wool jacket that she was hiding.

Another *atajadora* had to intervene.

Modesta's awareness of her subaltern status before the rich family she worked for caused her to follow quietly their orders even when those orders negatively affected her physical and emotional well-being. Elena Poniatowska argues that servants develop a sense of fear when confronted with their new reality and their upper-class bosses: "A la patrona sólo puede hablársele si ella lo autoriza y en el lenguaje y la forma que ella ha escogido. El miedo se acendra, cala hasta los huesos, miedo al patrón, a la patrona, miedo a costumbres que no comprenden, ritos inexplicables..." (They can only address the boss if she authorizes it and the language and the way of speaking have been selected by her. Fear gets over them, it hurts in the bones. They are afraid of the bosses, afraid of customs they don't understand, afraid of

unexplainable rites...) [10]. Fear keeps Modesta from speaking against the Ochoas' abuses committed against her. However, once free from their rule Modesta can act towards other in the oppressive way in which she was previously treated. While she might not be consciously trying to retaliate against society by abusing someone less privileged than herself, she certainly expresses her frustration for her life experiences in a physically abusive manner.

2.5 “Power” Dynamics

As many Mexican domestic workers migrate from rural settings to the city, Elena Poniatowska argues, among other things, that one of the biggest problems for the maids is that they lose their identity when they leave their family and the agrarian society that was their home. Once their identity is lost, they adopt that of their *patronas*, Poniatowska argues. The concept of “identity” used by Poniatowska proves to be problematic nevertheless. Stuart Hall states that the concept of identity is fluid. That is, an individual's identity is determined not only by how he/she perceives his/herself, but also by how others view him/her. Identity, then, is a concept in constant negotiation and change. Identities, according to Hall, “are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a ‘lack’, across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them.” (6)

When examining the relationships between maid and boss, Poniatowska states that it is one where power alternates. The boss, the privileged woman, is the one in charge when everyone is watching, but it is the maid who has power over the privileged woman when the interaction is only between the two of them, Poniatowska explains. The writer explores such

power dynamics in her own work of fiction in texts such as “Love Story” and *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*.

Although maids’ position is one of complete inequality before upper-class women, there are literary examples in which the readers can identify key moments of rebellion that demonstrate the maid’s power (if only to a limited extent) over their *patronas*. Such is the case of Lupe, Teleca’s maid in Poniatowska’s “Love Story.” The short story takes place in a typical day in the life of the aristocrat Teleca, and it offers a view at the power dynamics at play between maids and their bosses. In the story, the writer shows how Teleca’s obsessive fascination with her maid results in her being dependent upon Lupe. Though it is obvious that the maid has a marginal role and her boss has power, in this story such categorizations are easily defied. While Teleca has the authority to order Lupe around, Lupe has the power to make her boss emotionally dependent on her. On the relationship between maids and their mistresses, Poniatowska points out that: “Los patrones emocionales femeninos se acentúan en la relación de casa-sirvienta. De alguna manera ambos, contienen sentimientos de inferioridad y ambas mujeres están insatisfechas” (The female emotional patterns are accentuated in the relationship house-servant. In a way both demonstrate feelings of inferiority and both woman are unsatisfied) [50]. In this text, Poniatowska’s assertion is proven as Teleca’s life is far from providing excitement and fulfillment. She spends her days with her friend Arturito playing cards and discussing Mexico’s history.

Teleca’s existence is presented as one where only her meetings with her upper-class friends and her domestic relationship with Lupe exist. Her relationship with Lupe would seem normal; however, when as readers we witness Teleca’s thoughts, we find that her obsession for

Lupe is such that her image is present in all her daily activities. For example, when reading the papers,

Teleca trató de concentrarse en los encabezados; se dio cuenta de que no le interesaban un pepino, nada le interesaba sino Lupe, saber qué pensaba Lupe, seguirla, pararse junto a ella frente al fregadero, mirar sus brazos redondos y macizos, sus brazos, dos manzanos con terminaciones de hojas –qué bonito se arrugaban sus yemas con el remojo- oír su joven voz, jugosa con sus manos.

Secretamente Lupe debía percibir el dominio que ejercía sobre su patrona porque fruncía el ceño y paraba la boca en un gesto altanero, malhumoriento. (121)

Teleca tried to concentrate on the headlines, but she realized that they did not interest her at all. Nothing interested her but Lupe. She wanted to know what Lupe was thinking; she wanted to follow her and stand by her by the sink, she wanted to see her round and strong arms: two apple trees with leave endings.

How pretty her fingers got wrinkled with the water! She wanted to hear her young voice, juicy like her hands. Secretly Lupe must have felt the influence she exerted over her boss because she would frown and would do a moody, arrogant sign with her mouth.

With such influence over Teleca, her life revolves around Lupe's. While the boss gives orders for the household chores, the maid, without uttering a word, controls her boss' thoughts. From within the system that places her as a subaltern being, Lupe succeeds not only in altering her boss' life, but she also finds moments of linguistic rebellion by keeping her dialect despite Teleca's dislike for it. One morning, over breakfast, Teleca tries to assert her authority:

-Lupe, la mermelada. ¿Por qué no pones la mermelada de naranja agria sobre la mesa? La mermelada y la mantequilla.

-Es que la señora me lo prohibió hace un mes porque no quería engordar...

-Pero ya no estoy a dieta.

-Ta' bueno pues.

-No se dice: "Ta' bueno pues". ¿Cuántas veces he de repetirte que se dice: "Sí señora"? (121)

-Lupe, the marmalade. Why don't you put the sour orange marmalade on the table? The marmalade and the butter.

-Because you prohibited it a month ago because you did not want to get fat...

-But I am not on a diet anymore.

-OK then.

-That's not the correct way to answer: "OK then." How many times do I have to tell you the correct way to address me: "Yes, madam."

By way of keeping her Spanish dialect, Lupe demonstrates a form of resistance to losing her linguistic identity. Moreover, contrary to what is expected of her, she talks back. In her introduction to *Se necesita muchacha*, Poniatowska speaks of the role of the maid in the house: "No pueden opinar, no tienen voz ni voto, no debe sentirseles. En la cocina, silencio; que no se oigan sus voces a la hora de la comida, no vayan a confundirse con la de los patrones, silencio, que no estorben, están allí para servir, secundar, no para protagonizar papel alguno" (They cannot have an opinion, they do not have a say, they must not be felt. In the kitchen, silence; their voices must not be heard during meal times so that they are not confused with their bosses',

silence, they must not stand in anyone's way, they are there to serve, to follow, not to take a main role) [46].

Even if "Love Story" is a text in which the protagonists share power, the representation of the maid is more the exception than the norm. Although it is clear that of the two women it is Teleca who enjoys the privilege of attending social gatherings with friends to drink tea while discussing Mexican history while Lupe must employ her time cleaning up her boss' house, the story's ending shows how the maid broke the norm by leaving her job before being fired. It is important to note, however, that domestic labor was Lupe's exclusive responsibility. Domestic labor, in this case, prevented Lupe's intellectual development, and, at the same time, allowed for Teleca's intellectual growth.

If in "Love Story" the figure of the maid exerts power, at least emotionally, over her boss', in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* the maid openly challenges her boss when faced with abuses on her part. Jesusa Palancares, the fictional character in Poniatowska's novel, is a fierce woman who learned to deal with life's hardships since her childhood. Through Poniatowska's text the readers learn about Jesusa's troubled relationships with her father, step-mothers, her husband, and her bosses. In her account of her life, Jesusa recalls the many jobs she performed to earn a living. I would like to concentrate in her work as a maid when she arrives in the city. In the words of Rosario Castellanos, Jesusa Palancares is a:

[...] criada de patronas miserables que le escatiman hasta las sobras de la comida, que le hacen trampas con el sueldo, que descargan en ella su cólera, sus frustraciones, la humillación constante de su propia vida; operaria de fábrica sin contrato y sin protección; mesera, fichera y, si no cae en al prostitución, es por su extrema repugnancia al sexo y porque prefiere establecer con los hombres una

relación de camaradería no de dependencia ni, menos aún, de sumisión.

(Declaración 108)

[...] servant of stingy bosses who skimp on even the leftovers, that do not pay her fair salary, that take out their rage on her, their frustrations, the constant humiliation of their own lives; factory worker without a contract and without benefits; waitress, bartender, and, if she doesn't become a prostitute, is because of her extreme aversion to sex and because she prefers to establish relationships with men based on camaraderie and not on dependence and, much less, on submissiveness.

Being an independent and outspoken woman, Jesusa shows little tolerance for the abuses committed against her. When she starts working for a French woman and is told to clean up her children after playing in the dirt, Jesusa refuses and even leaves her job without pay:

Me daban horror. La francesa los dejaba que se empuercaran y luego no los quería limpiar ella, ¿y por qué los iba a limpiar yo? Tenían sus carnitas pegostrosas, secas, secas, secas.

-No, eso yo no lo voy a limpiar.

-Por eso te pago.

-No me pague, pero a mí no me hace que metas las manos donde no debo.

Enséñelos a que se limpien ellos, pero antes aprenda usted a limpiarse aunque sea con un olote. *(Hasta no verte 58)*

They disgusted me. The French woman would let them get messy and then she did not want to clean them up herself, so why would I have to clean them up?

Their skin was sticky and very dry.

-No, I am not going to clean that.

-That's why I pay you.

-Don't pay me, but you won't make me stick my hands where I shouldn't.

Teach your children to clean themselves up, but before that learn to clean up yourself even if with a corn cob.

The French woman's refusal to clean up her children shows that from her position as an employer, she delegated demeaning tasks to her maid. As Mary Romero has noted, "employers hire persons to replace labor at once considered demeaning and closely identified with family roles of mothers and wives. As employers, housewives decide what aspects of their physical labor they no longer want to perform, and in doing so they determine the employee's work ("Bonds" 130). Jesusa's refusal to perform personal services outside her housework duties shows her determination not to be taken advantage of. Despite exercising her power to leave her work behind because of unfair conditions, her decision put her in a disadvantaged position not having a source of income.

For all of Jesusa's gains when defending herself against her French boss, she must also experience the abuses of her new boss in Mexico City. Once employed by the Spanish woman Pepita, Jesusa is given the responsibility of taking care of all housework: "A la señora Pepita le tenía que hacer todo el quehacer; lavar, planchar, limpiar el suelo. Entonces los pisos eran de madera y se lavaban cada ocho días con escobeta y lejía y se pintaban de amarillo congo todos los sábados" (I had to do all housework for Mrs. Pepita. I had to do the laundry, iron the clothes,

clean the floors. Back then the floors were wooden and they were washed every week with a brush and bleach, and they were painted in bright yellow every Saturday) [140]. Despite being promised a monthly salary of \$3.00 (pesos), Jesusa never receives her wages. Moreover, Jesusa receives very little food and the unsafe work conditions cause her to become ill. Pepita fires Jesusa because she is no longer capable of performing her duties, and Jesusa must leave without her fair pay. As Poniatowska states in *Se necesita muchacha*, maids are the mercy of their bosses who rarely have any knowledge of the law that protects domestic workers:

Si sobre los hombros de una empleada doméstica descansa el funcionamiento de la casa, si gracias a ella, la patrona puede trabajar o dedicarse a lo que interesa, si por ella hay comida y limpieza, los artículos de la Constitución que garantizan su bienestar son prácticamente inexistentes, su redacción por demás vaga y sus sueldos se sujetan finalmente a la buena voluntad de la patrona que nunca ni por equivocación ha leído la *Ley Federal del Trabajo* (41).

If the responsibility of a house rests on the domestic worker's shoulders, if thanks to her the mistress can work or do what interests her, if because of her there is food and the house is clean, the articles of the Constitution that guarantee her well-being are practically non-existent, its vague language, and their salaries are subject to the mistress' will who never nor even by mistake has read the *Ley Federal del Trabajo*

Although Mexican law “provides” for fair working conditions of all domestic workers, such law is rarely implemented, leaving the workers at the mercy of their bosses. Jesusa is subjected to unfair working conditions and subsequently fired. Poniatowska's character defies the rules that

dictate her submissiveness and decides not to leave her place of employment before talking back to her boss.

2.6 The Emotional Labor of the Maid¹⁰

Elena Garro's "La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas" offers a look at the betrayal of La Malinche on her own people. However, rather than being a re-production of the historical events, the story shows the betrayal of a wife in mid 20th Century Mexico. La Malinche becomes Laura (*la señora Laurita*), a young woman married to a government official. The readers learn about Laura's psychological struggles by way of an intimate conversation established between *patrona* and *sirvienta*.

Garro's story develops as a tale where the divide between actual and fantastic facts is blurred. What is clear, nonetheless, is the fact that the story deconstructs the historical accounts of the Conquest to accommodate it to modern Mexico. Laura, just like Malintzin, struggles with the guilt of her betrayal to her family. At the same time, Laura suffers because she feels that she first betrayed her own people.

Laura's marriage to Pablo is unfulfilling to her. Throughout the story we find that Pablo is more concerned with his own interests than with anything pertaining to Laura. The maids notice the way in which the husband ignores the wife and her subsequent boredom. Laura later acknowledges the lack of excitement in her marriage during her conversation with Nacha:

[...] Entonces el señor, volvió a hablar del Presidente López Mateos.

“-Ya sabes que ese nombre no se le cae de la boca –había comentado

Josefina, desdeñosamente.

¹⁰ In her chapter "Bonds of Sisterhood – Bonds of Oppression" from *Made in the U.S.A.* Mary Romero discusses the many reasons why domestic workers are hired not only for physical labor, but also for emotional labor.

En sus adentros ellas pensaban que la señora Laurita se aburría oyendo hablar siempre del señor presidente y de las visitas oficiales.

-¡Lo que son las cosas, Nachita, yo nunca había notado lo que me aburría con Pablo hasta esa noche! –comentó la señora abrazándose con cariño las rodillas y dándoles súbitamente la razón a Josefina y a Nachita. (16-17)

[...] Mr. Pablo went back to talking about President López Mateos.

“- You already know that all that man talks about is President López Mateos, he never drops his name –Josefina had commented disdainfully.

Inside, they both thought that Mrs. Laurita got bored listening to her husband talk about the President and official visits.

-How ironic, Nachita, I had never realized how bored I was until that night! –said Laurita lovingly embracing her knees and suddenly agreeing with Josefina and Nachita.]

After Pablo discovers Laura’s infidelity, she desperately looks for approval and understanding of her actions. She finds an “accomplice” in Nacha, one of the two family’s maids, who lends Laura an ear and then supports her views as well. I am interested in looking at the relationship of trust that develops between the two women. Laura looks to Nachita’s sympathy to confirm that she is not alone in her guilt:

-¿Y tú, Nachita, eres traidora?

La miró con esperanzas. Si Nacha compartía su calidad traidora, la entendería, y Laura necesitaba que alguien la entendiera esa noche.

Nacha reflexionó unos instantes, se volvió a mirar el agua que empezaba a hervir con estrépito, la sirvió sobre el café y el aroma caliente la hizo sentirse a gusto cerca de su patrona.

-Sí, yo también soy traicionera, señora Laurita. (12)

-And you, Nachita, are you a traitor?

She looked at her full of hope. If Nacha shared her disloyal nature, she would understand her, and Laura needed someone to understand her that night.

Nacha reflected for a few moments, she turned to the check on the water that started to boil loudly, she poured it over the coffee, and the warm smell made her feel at ease so close to her boss.

-Yes, I am a traitor too, Mrs. Laurita

Once Laura and Nacha establish that they have something in common, the conversation between *sirvienta* and *patrona* reveals that despite their differences, they share common female experiences, but also that the upper-class boss depends emotionally in the support that her working-class maid can provide. When analyzing the intimacy of the connection between the boss and her maid, Doris Meyers notes Nacha's confession and Laura's need for identification:

Without explaining this mysterious assertion, Garro focuses on the unspoken bond between the two women, emphasizing the protective enclosure of the kitchen, not only physically but psychologically: "La cocina estaba separada del mundo por un muro invisible de tristeza, por un compás de espera." Both servant and mistress are marginated females who seek each other's support in spite of their unequal status. (155)

Such bond created between boss and maid, is not balanced. Mary Romero states that: “The relationship of emotional labor is in no way reciprocal. Employers expect to be consoled; the inherent power relation of employer-employee means that middle-class white housewives have little fear of rebuttal, retaliation, or disparagement.” (138) Thus, Laurita’s insistence in getting a reply from Nacha, answers to her need for approval in order to relieve herself from guilt and not to a true interest in Nacha’s character or beliefs. Moreover, Laurita knows that her story will remain a secret because, as Romero notes, “Working-class women of color are safe confidantes because they do not have access to the same social world.” (138)

2.7 “Las Gatitas” and the Monstrous Maid

The presence of the maid in Mexican culture belongs almost exclusively in the mass medium of television. *Telenovelas* (soap operas) portray maids as submissive characters who, at best, work in the stories as the “dark” sidekick to the “white” protagonist. Visually, the maids in *telenovelas* are darker-skinned than their fictional mistresses. Contrastingly, the mistresses are almost inevitably played by light-skinned actresses who look more like northern Europeans than *mestizas*. The message given to the audience by the contrasting visual characteristics of these fictional characters is that dark-skinned, indigenous-looking women can only aspire to be in the supporting role to the story’s heroine. Moreover, in the rare occasions when the maid is light-skinned, it is because she, in actuality, is the lost daughter of a wealthy family.

If in television the figure of the maid is sometimes that of the confidant and accomplice of her boss, the perception of the maid in real life is usually more complicated than that. The place of the maid in the cultural imaginary is often that of woman with little education, poor taste, and questionable life choices. Even though they do all the work to keep up a house, they are rarely “seen” by their bosses and even by the public in general. Poniatowska notes that:

Los conductores dentro de sus coches pasan junto a ellas y no las ven. O tan poco. No importan. Son las criaditas, las gatas domingueras. Ellas en cambio esperan. Esperan ¿qué? Es su día de salida. ¿Qué van a hacer? Nada o casi nada. Quizá den vuelta en Chapultepec (siempre se comen la “c”) o vayan a la Villa, ésta sí es una excursión, se chupen una paleta helada o compran un barquillo. Se conforman con poco. (*Se necesita* Poniatowska 15)

The drivers inside their cars pass by them and do not see them. Or maybe a little. They do not matter. They are the little maids, the ones that go out every Sunday. They, on the contrary, wait and hope. What do they wait for? It is their day off. What are they going to do? Nothing or almost nothing. Perhaps they will go to Chapultepec (they always omit the “c”) or maybe they will go to the Villa, that would be an excursion, maybe they will have a popsicle or buy an ice cream cone. They are happy with little.

Spending their lives serving others, the maids, suggests Poniatowska, wait patiently for their day off: the day when they can enjoy a few hours to themselves away from their work responsibilities. In his “Con la flor del domingo...” Jaime Sabines writes about the life expectations of the maids taking as a departing point their day off:

Las gatitas, las criadas, las muchachas de la servidumbre contemporánea, se conforman con esto. En tanto llegan a la prostitución, o regresan al seno de la familia miserable, ellas tienen el descanso del domingo, la posibilidad de un noviazgo, la ocasión del sueño. Bastan dos o tres horas de este paseo en blanco para olvidar las fatigas, y para

enfrentarse risueñamente a la amenaza de los platos sucios, de la ropa pendiente y de los mandados que no acaban. (61)

The servants, the maids, the contemporary service girls, are happy with that. While they wait to arrive at prostitution, or to come back to their poor families, they have the Sunday break; the possibility of a relationship, the occasion of dreaming. Two or three hours of that Sunday walk are enough to forget their fatigue and to happily face the threat of dirty plates, of pending laundry, and of the endless chores.

While Sabines' texts shows his sympathy for the maids, it, nevertheless, clearly shows the view of the maids as women with little ambition who sooner or later will arrive at a tragic ending such as prostitution. Sabines' text also suggests that the women's fate is to return to their impoverished homes with their families. Traditionally, young women from rural communities are sought after by city families because of the limited economic possibilities in their native communities which makes them cheap labor in the highly unregulated field of domestic work.

Another example of the representation of the maid in Mexican culture is that of the monstrous woman capable of influencing her boss to the point of latter's own fall. Juan García Ponce's "La noche" (The Night) presents the figure of the maid (*la criada*) as such monstrous being. From the onset the narrator-protagonist places the maid in the center of a terrible secret. The narrator, describes Marta, Beatriz's maid, as a sinister character not only physically, but also morally. In his view, Marta disrupts the good conduct and mores of the tenants in the apartment complex.

“La noche” is a voyeuristic tale of desire told from the conservative perspective of an upper-class man. Interestingly, save one, all the characters he observes are female. One night he witnesses an encounter between his neighbor’s maid and her lover, while, at the same time, he finds out that his neighbors’ marriage is experiencing upheaval. From that night on, the narrator feels guilty for wanting to know exactly what is going on in their neighbor’s life. He finds his curiosity to be immoral and vows to protect his wife and daughter from the secrets that he is now a part of. His obsession with his neighbors’ life and with a “terrible secret” he is certain they are covering unfolds throughout the story to finally accept that he desires his neighbor’s wife, Beatriz.

The narrator’s strict mores make him deny his attraction for Beatriz and want to protect his family, wife Cristina and daughter Luisita, from his own desires. Each night he becomes a prisoner to his own thoughts as he is frightened by them. Not wanting to disrupt his familial bliss, he cannot conceive of the idea of finding another woman sexually appealing. He confesses at the end, however, that it was love that drove him to Beatriz.

What is noteworthy, besides García Ponce’s narrative skills, is the treatment of the working-class. The narrator positions himself as a person of financial means. If not as well off as his neighbors Enrique and Beatriz, he acknowledges that his position one of privilege. He makes clear distinctions between the conduct of the upper-class and that of the lower-end working-class. Although Beatriz and Enrique’s marriage fails because of his affair with Olga, the narrator attributes part of the responsibility the Marta, Beatriz’s maid. Moreover, his comments about the working-class are applied generally to all maids. In his view, Beatriz’s elegant manners disappear soon after Marta takes over the command of her house. From the beginning, he recognizes the influence of the maid over her boss:

La presencia de ese extraño ser, sobre cuyos móviles todavía no soy capaz de detenerme y cuya influencia sobre Beatriz me parece en gran parte inexplicable, se hizo evidente muy pronto. Aparte de su costumbre de hablar casi siempre a gritos, inclusive cuando simplemente se trataba de darle algún recado a su señora o de transmitir alguna de sus órdenes a la niña, Marta trató desde el principio de hacerse dueña absoluta del patio y con mucha frecuencia tenía discusiones y pleitos con las criadas de los distintos apartamentos. (128)

The presence of that strange being which motives I am still unable to comprehend and whose influence over Beatriz is still unexplainable to me, soon became evident. Besides her habit of yelling, even when she was trying to deliver a message to her boss, or to communicate an order to the little girl, Marta tried from the beginning to become the absolute owner of the patio, and frequently she would have arguments and fights with the maids serving in the other apartments

In the narrator eyes, the sophisticated Beatriz let herself get influenced by her maid to the point where she allows too much familiarity with her.

Había algo obsceno en la falta de distancia entre una y otra; oyendo sus risas podía pensarse que se trataba de dos criadas entre las que no había ninguna diferencia. Sin embargo, yo conocía a Beatriz y sabía que era una persona fina y delicada, en la que sólo podían encontrarse cualidades, por lo que la situación me parecía más inexplicable aún. (105)

There was something obscene in the lack of distance between the two women. Hearing them laugh one could think that they were two maids between whom there was no difference. However, I knew Beatriz and I knew that she an elegant and delicate person, a person that could only have good qualities. For that reason the situation seemed all the more unexplainable.

Marta is constructed here as a devious character whose lack of sophistication is aggravated by her willingness to be an accomplice in Beatriz's secrets: "Al cabo de un momento, la criada abrió la puerta y salió al patio. Estaba en fondo y el pelo suelto le caía sobre los hombros dándole un aspecto descuidado y un tanto salvaje, aspecto al que contribuían también su alta estatura y sus formas llenas, casi demasiado robustas para una mujer" (After a moment, the maid opened the door and came out to the patio. She was wearing a slip and had her hair down which gave her a messy and wild aspect. Her tall height and her full-body contributed to such grotesque aspect. She was too robust for a woman) [104]. Beyond her construction as a physically unattractive woman, Marta's character is highlighted as being "naturally" cruel and her conduct as being immoral. On the night when he started watching from his window, the narrator tells of the "horror" of the maid receiving her lover, a factory worker or a manual laborer, in her room:

El hombre cerró la puerta tras de sí con sumo cuidado y enseguida, como si obedeciera a un mecanismo preciso o a una señal diabólica y terrible que sólo ella podía percibir, la puerta del cuarto de servicio se abrió también y la criada, envuelta a medias en una colcha, que no hacía más que acentuar su desnudez, salió al encuentro con el hombre y se quedó un instante de pie, junto a él, tomándolo de la mano. Entonces, para completar la escena y no dejar ninguna

duda sobre su horror esencial, la niña, cuyo llanto estábamos acostumbrados ya a escuchar, salió también del cuarto restregándose los ojos con las manos y se quedó de pie, a unos cuantos pasos de la pareja, mirándolos sin decidirse a hablarles. (108)

The man closed the door behind him with extreme care and immediately, as if answering to a precise mechanism or to a diabolic and terrible sign that only she could perceive, the door to the maid's room opened and the maid, wrapped in a blanket that only accentuated her nudity, came out to meet the man. She stood by his side holding his hand. Then, to complete the picture and so not to create any doubts about their essential horror, the little girl, whose crying we were used to hearing, came out of the room scratching her eyes with her hands and stood close to the couple, looking at them hesitating on whether to speak to them.

For the narrator, the maid's "essential" horror not only consist of her having a relationship with a working-class man, but the in her being perceived as vulgar and overly sexual. The narrator goes on to provide yet another essentialist view of Marta when she comments on the fact that Luisita's father, unlike Ines', does pick her up from the bus stop:

- Mira que suerte tiene ella: su papá sí va a recogerla.

La niña obedeció de la misma manera mecánica que lo había hecho antes, al saludarme. A mí, en el momento, me sorprendió la maligna crueldad del comentario, pero lo atribuí a una ignorancia y una falta de sensibilidad natural y olvidé muy pronto el incidente. (130)

- Look, she is very lucky: her father does come to pick her up.

The little girl obeyed in the same mechanical way that she had done before, when greeting me. At the moment, I was surprised by the malicious cruelty of her comment, but I attributed it to ignorance and a lack of natural sensibility and I forgot the incident very soon.

In addition to being in essence cruel and aggressive, Marta is also pointed as a terrible mother. The constant reminders that she does not pay attention to her own daughter crying and the fact that she does not take good care of Beatriz's children, make her even more sinister in the eyes of the narrator: "Tanto ella como el niño pequeño estaban siempre a cargo de Marta, que era la única que se ocupaba de ellos, y en muchas ocasiones sus ropas sucias y mal elegidas y su peinado generalmente deshecho revelaban, más allá de la gracia natural de su figura, un descuido imperdonable" (Both the little girl and the baby boy were in the care of Marta. She was the only one that took care of them. Lots of times their dirty and badly chosen clothes, and their hair, generally undone, revealed much more than their natural grace, Marta's unforgiving mistake) [132]. Marta's "unforgiving mistake" was that of not performing the emotional labor of mothering her boss' children. Therefore, Marta's lack of care for Beatriz's children, results in her being represented as a devious character.

The nature of housework places women within a sexist system. Women are traditionally required to keep a house and raise children with little involvement on the part of their male partners. Housewives such as Sefchovich's Ana Fernández are oppressed by the demeaning nature of domestic work that is not shared by the rest of their family members. Ana's unfulfilling life only finds an escape when she discovers the joy of reading. Once freed from the demands of her family, she can finally feel liberated. Ana's liberation, however, is possible due

to her upper-middle class status which allows her the means to access books therefore opening her eyes to the possibility of “escaping” her domestic duties.

When upper- and upper-middle class women can pay another woman to take over the housework so she can take care of other tasks or pursue a professional career, the paid domestic worker replaces the housewife at home. However demeaning housework may be, maids cannot easily escape it when domestic work is the only type available to them. Castellanos’ Modesta Gómez endured the physical and emotional abuses of her bosses because she was a burden to her family who placed her at the service of the Ochoas. Poniatowska’s Jesusa Palancares, although more defiant, was also the target of abuses at the hands of her *patronas*. They unlike, Ana, could not escape the demeaning nature of their work by finding more creative ways of expression as their survival depended on their wages.

Although maids are in general in a disadvantaged position with regard to their bosses, in texts such as “Love Story,” and “La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas” *patronas* are emotionally dependent on their maids. While for Teleca Lupe becomes an obsession, Laurita seeks understanding and support from Nacha. In both of these texts the maids gain power, if only momentarily. Lupe exercises her free will when she leaves Teleca’s house without informing her about it. Nacha is put in a position of “power” because Laurita needs her sympathetic ear so not to feel as guilty.

While representations of the maid in Mexican culture are generally stereotypical (either lacking intelligence, and ambition or being devious), the texts discussed in this chapter point to the complexity of such representations. It might seem obvious that upper-class women have absolute power over their servants; however, such “power” alternates between the two women in

opposite ends of the socioeconomic scale whenever women on the lower end of it show resistance to the societal structures in which they operate.

CHAPTER 3

SUBSTITUTE MOTHERHOOD: NANNIES IN MEXICAN CULTURE

As mothers, women have been idealized and also exploited.
--Adrienne Rich

The globalization of domestic service contributes
to the reproduction of inequality between nations
in transnational capitalism and cases reported of
domestic servitude are increasingly characterized
as global gender apartheid.
--Mary Romero

3.1 Mothers and Mothering

In this chapter I discuss the role of the nanny in the lives of their upper-class charges. I explore the significance of race and/or ethnicity in the construction of affective relationships between nannies and the children they care for, and the effect that such relationships might have in their lives as adults. I look at texts from both Mexico and the United States. By looking at the two neighboring countries, I analyze substitute binational motherhood as represented in the body of the nanny. Ehrenreich and Russell Hochschild compare the traditional relationship between the sexes with the one between developed and developing nations in the global economy:

The First World takes on a role like that of the old-fashioned male in the family—pampered, entitled, unable to cook, clean, or find his socks. Poor countries take on a role like that of the traditional woman within the family—patient, nurturing, and self-denying. A division of labor feminists critiqued when it has “local” has now, metaphorically speaking, gone global. (11-12)

In that sense, the Mexican nannies offer nurturing to their First World charges while at the same time self-denying their right to be close to her own children and grandchildren in Mexico.

The figure of the mother is, without a doubt, a commonplace in Mexican culture since Pre-Colombian times. Yxta Maya Murray's "La Llorona" (The Weeping Woman), is a modern re-telling of the Aztec story of Cihuacoatl. The traditional legend suggests that upon learning of the upcoming demise of the Aztec empire, Cihuacoatl makes the decision of killing her children before letting them become slaves to the white newcomers.¹¹ Murray's story presents a devoted wife and mother who finds that her children are growing up and will soon become men, and that her husband is no longer interested in her. She soon realizes the need to protect herself:

My hands would have turned into claws if anyone threatened my family, I would have died for them, spread out my body like a blanket, opened to any knife, just to keep them safe, to keep them mine forever. And then the lies came, and I had to protect myself. I had to do the hardest things, and sing and cry to let the heavens know that I was doing them. (24)

Murray's *Llorona* understands the dangers of patriarchy and remains quiet after realizing that her husband was having an affair. Moreover, she knows that her children will also fall "victims" of patriarchy by following the ways of their father. She observes that "I saw how they would only become bigger, how they would grow dark shadows above their lips, their voices getting harder and thicker, their footfalls heavy" (25). Seeing that her sons would grow up to perpetuate patriarchy, she decides to prepare herself to end the cycle by taking her children's lives. If Cihuacoatl ended her children's lives as a way of saving them from slavery, Murray's *Llorona* sees in the death of her children a way to prevent them from becoming oppressors. Furthermore, *Llorona's* murderous act is her only way of exerting power if, as Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy claim:

¹¹ The many versions of the legend of "La Llorona" seem to refer back to Medea in Greek mythology. In fact, Murray's story echoes both the myth of Medea and the legend of Cihuacoatl.

Under patriarchal capitalism, motherhood is largely about private property: the children are the property of the father who “loans” them temporarily to the mother, whose duty is to raise those children according to the father’s law. In turn, private property and the whole notion of ownership are about competition; the idea is to amass more, or at least better, property than held by others, because property is power. (8)

If children are not even the “property” of the mother, it is safe to conclude that the drowning of her sons was, in fact, a way for *Llorona* to show resistance to being denied the right to claiming her offspring as her own.

“Woman Hollering Creek” by Sandra Cisneros offers yet another contemporary reinterpretation of *La Llorona*. Cisneros’s *Llorona* (the weeping woman) becomes *La Gritona* (the hollering woman) signaling a shift from the traditional notion that the murderous mother cried eternally for her children to the notion that the mother is one who has a voice and is demanding presence. When Cleófilas gets married and moves to Seguin, Texas, she imagines that her life will be just as the lives of her favorite *telenovela* heroines. Instead, she realizes that she is caught in an unsatisfying relationship:

She has to remind herself why she loves him when she changes the baby’s Pampers, or when she mops the bathroom floor, or tries to make curtains for the doorways without door, or whiten the linen. Or wonder a little when he kicks the refrigerator and says he hates this shitty house and is going out where he won’t be bothered with the baby’s howling and her suspicious questions [...] (49)

Soon the abuse moves from verbal to physical with Cleófilas being unable to escape it. All the while, the legend of *La Llorona*, as made evident by the Woman Hollering Creek, remains in the

background suggesting that death could be a possible solution to Cleófilas and her children's suffering. Instead, the young woman gets help from other women and is able to return to Mexico to her family. Much like Murray's take on *La Llorona*, Cisneros' story criticizes the reproduction of patriarchy. Nevertheless, Cisneros chooses to provide her protagonist with the option of fighting patriarchy with the help of women even if, paradoxically, Cleófilas safe haven is her father's house in her paternal land.

Although the discussion about the significance of the mother in Mexican culture is quite common, my work in this chapter seeks to insert the nanny into the discussion about mothers and motherhood. To that end, I analyze three texts involving the presence of a nanny in the lives of upper-class girls and young women. I focus on two styles of mothering that result inadequate to the daughters as presented in Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate*, Elena Poniatowska's *La "Flor de Lis,"* and Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán*. Additionally, I look at the role of immigrant nannies in an increasingly global economy through the analysis of contemporary films such as *Paris, je t'aime*, *La misma luna (Under the Same Moon)*, *A Day Without a Mexican*, and *Babel*.

3.2 Nannies and Substitute Motherhood

Whether women require the services of a nanny for professional reasons or to fulfill their social obligations, they benefit from the physical and emotional care that their workers provide. When upper-class mothers rely on the work of other women to care for their children, oftentimes the nanny becomes the substitute mother that fills the gaps left by the biological mother. 20th Century Mexican cultural production provides good examples of the role played by the nanny when the mother does not fully perform her "traditional" role as a mother. I specifically look at how the nanny fills the role of the alternate mother where the upper-class mother "fails" to

perform such role. When discussing mothering in her ground-breaking *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich notes that,

Most of us were raised by our mothers, or by women who for love, necessity, or money took the place of our biological mothers. Throughout history women have helped birth and nurture each other's children. Most women have been mothers in the sense of tenders and carers for the young, whether as sisters, aunts, nurses, teachers, foster-mothers, stepmothers. Tribal life, the village, the extended family, the female networks of some cultures, have included the very young, very old, unmarried, and infertile women in the process of "mothering." (12)

For Rich, therefore, one does not become a mother only by giving birth to a child, but also by way of caring for one. The nannies studied here become mothers by substituting their charges' biological mothers for a period of time in their lives.

As mothers, women are expected to be the full providers of physical and emotional support to their children. They are to feed them, clothe them, bathe them, teach them, and counsel them, among many other things. Nevertheless, when they are unable or unwilling to provide their children with each and every aspect of their expected role, their children find what they are lacking in their nannies. Mary Romero notes that:

Systems of class, racial, ethnic, gender and citizenship domination are taught to children by witnessing "the arbitrary and capricious interaction of parents and servants or if they are permitted to treat domestic servants in a similar manner."

As children move from their homes located in class (and frequently racially) segregated neighborhoods to schools (also likely to be segregated), power

relationships and the larger community's class and racial etiquette are further reinforced. ("The Nanny" 837)

More often than not the care-takers come from a racial/ethnic background considered to be inferior of that of the mother who hired them. Such hierarchies, as Romero states, are inevitably learned and perpetuated.

3.3 Elusive Motherhood

Elena Poniatowska's *La "Flor de Lis"* offers a good case for the study of the place of the mother in a child's life when she remains an emotional absence even when she is physically present. In her biographical account of her early years in Mexico after emigrating with her family from France in the mid 20th Century, Poniatowska tells the story of the family through the eyes of a child: Mariana. Mariana, a character presumably based on Poniatowska, provides an account of hers and her sister's experiences growing up in the country of their mother's birth. Though their mother's relationship with Mexico is one of disdain, the two girls begin a period of discovery and adaptation to their new land.

While in France Mariana and Sofía, her sister, are put in the care of French nannies with their mother being minimally involved in their care. As such, the two girls grow accustomed to interacting closely with their nannies. Once in Mexico, Mariana and her sister continue to be cared for by nannies only now their care-takers are Mexican women from rural areas. In her study on the works and life of Poniatowska, Beth Jörgensen notes that

In Mexico, domestic servants provide needed connections to the new land and its people through the language they teach her and the places which they explore together by bus and on foot. The Zócalo, Xochimilco, Chapultepec, *tamalerías*,

and innumerable city streets become sites of an encounter between the French-born *duquesita* and Mexican reality. (125)

Mariana's Mexican nanny, thus, becomes the bridge between her aristocratic European upbringing and her new reality in her adopted country. Moreover, the formation of Mariana's Mexican identity does not come from her mother, but rather from her nanny.

Magda, hired by Luz at her daughters' insistence, comes to represent Mariana's idealized vision of the Mexican *pueblo* with her black braids, her fascinating tales and superstitions, and her generous indulgence of her young mistresses' whims. Magda is also the cause of Mariana's first pangs of social conscience. Their intimacy forces the girl to question a social hierarchy which separates the two friends at dinnertime, sending one to the kitchen and the other to the sumptuous dining room. (Jørgensen 125)

In many ways, nannies, although themselves very young, take the place of the mother who participates actively in her children's education. Jørgensen has noted the elusive nature of Luz, mother of Mariana and Sofía in *La "Flor de Lis:"*

Luz is the emotional and structural axis of the novel, but she is an elusive, moving center around whom the narrator's words revolve in an unending spiral of love and longing. As a result, Mariana represents neither the achievement of the separation and singularity privileged by male-dominated models of development nor the success of strong attachments and relationships which some theories attribute to female psychological growth. (110)

The role of the mother that the paid child care workers take, is, however, not completely fulfilling as they are replaced in several occasions. The girls have their nannies in France and

continue to have them when they relocate to Mexico. Their Mexican nanny Magda, “an indigenous girl not so many years older than Mariana, is not only nanny and friend but also an indispensable link to Mexican customs and places for her two young charges” (120). While Luz is too busy to establish a motherly bond with her daughters, they find a “replacement” first in their French nannies and later in their Mexican counterpart. When Nounou, the nanny from rural France, is fired, Mariana reminisces about the time spent together with her:

Nos organiza nuestra pequeña vida, nos saca al aire, la promenade, le llama. Nos abotona el vestido, el suéter, el abrigo; en París hay que abotonarse muchos botones. Luego la bufanda, la gorrita que cubre las orejas. “Il faut prendre l’air.” Levanto los brazos. “Usted debe respirar. Aprenda a inhalar, a exhalar. Camine derecha.” Veo la calle gris, el frío que sube del Sena al cielo gris, las piedras del pavimento y las rejillas. Con un palo escarbo entre ellas para sacar la tierrita, las hojas muertas, las del año pasado, del antepasado. “Camine, qué está usted haciendo allí, ¿Por qué se agacha?” Mi hermana corre sobre sus piernas largas, a ella no le dice ni que respire ni que se echa para atrás los hombros. (Poniatowska 20)

She organizes our little life, she takes us to get fresh air, the promenade, she calls it. She buttons our dresses, our sweater, our coat; in Paris you have to fasten lots of buttons. Next is the scarf, the hat that covers our ears. “Il faut prendre l’air.” I raise my arms. “You should learn to breathe. Learn to inhale and exhale. Walk straight.” I see the somber road, the cold that goes up from the Seine to the gray sky, the pebbles in the pavement and the vents. With a pole a dig between the

vents for dust, dry leaves, the ones from last year, from the previous year. “Walk, what are you doing there? Why do you hunch your back?” My sister runs with her long legs. Nounou does not tell her to breathe or to throw her shoulders back. Evidently, Nounou assumes the role of a mother to the girls. The nanny instructs Mariana as to how to be graceful. Nounou’s place in the development of the girls is crucial as they learn “feminine” patterns from her. With a caring, maternal attitude, Nounou educates the girls. Conversely, their mother, Luz, does not engage in such exchanges with her daughters. Moreover, Nounou’s maternal relationship with the girls extends to the moment of their birth: “...Recibí a bebé Mariana el 21 de mayo. Bebé pesa tres kilos. Toma tres onzas de leche cada seis horas” (I received baby Mariana on May 21st. Baby weights three kilos. She drinks three ounces of milk every six hours) [10].

Elena Poniatowska’s work is often centered on underprivileged characters. She is, in many cases, the voice of the voiceless as evidenced by her *testimonio* works. Nevertheless, the writer shows an awareness of the privileged status within Mexican society as both an intellectual and as a direct descendant of European nobility. Jörgensen notes about Poniatowska’s texts:

Thus the stories and fictions about the privileges attendant upon wealth and skin color, and they are texts which show privilege to be a fiction, and a harmful fiction—a product of human language and human structures of power and a lie based on the illusion of inherent and inherited superiority. These titles elaborate a more personal perspective on Elena Poniatowska’s continuing challenge to patriarchal values (both social and literary) and her deconstruction of the prerogative of class. (102)

When sent to study abroad in a U.S. boarding school along with Sofia, Mariana learns of the expectations for privileged young women from the nuns whose tutelage she is under. However, as Jörgensen points out, in this text, as well as in *Lilus Kikus*, “irony subverts the surface portrayal of the protagonists’ acquiescence to expectations” (115). She explains that Mariana,

[...] Frequently interrupts her own enthusiastic, rapid-fire narration of boarding school camaraderie to reflect upon the things that she and her classmates did *not* discuss. Poverty, injustice, and class difference never enter the conversations or, presumably, the thoughts of the girls whose family names—de Bayle, Somoza, Ferré—guarantee their place at “the top of the top, la crème de la crème, la cereza en la punta” (99). The voice of an older, more critical Mariana is evident here behind her multilingual recitation of adolescent self-satisfaction and her dreams of movie stars and Milky Way bars. (115)

Mariana is quite conscious of social inequality. Yet, her privileged socioeconomic position will inevitably place her at a distance from her caretakers, paradoxically, as she becomes more aware of her status.

3.4 Patriarchal Motherhood

Laura Esquivel’s *Como agua para chocolate* quickly became an international literary success that was soon produced into a film. Both novel and film helped bring to the forefront issues of race, and gender inequality. The story is set in the northern Mexican state of Coahuila during the times of the Mexican Revolution. The de la Garza family, made up of the father, the mother and two daughters, enjoys the comforts of a traditional upper-class family living in a rural setting. When the family welcomes its third child, Tita, the father unexpectedly dies of a heart attack leaving Mamá Elena as the head of the family. While the three sisters grow up

under their mother authoritarian wing, it is Tita who is subjected to Mamá Elena's iron fist the most. Because of a family tradition, she is expected to remain by her mother's side until her death and never to marry. From the moment of her birth, Tita is placed in the care of Nacha. When her mother is unable to produce breast milk, the little girl is fed *atoles* by her caring nanny:

A Mamá Elena, de la impresión se le fue la leche. Como en estos tiempos no había leche en polvo ni nada que se le pareciera, y no pudieron conseguir nodriza por ningún lado, se vieron en un verdadero lío para calmar el hambre de la niña. Nacha, que se las sabía de todas todas respecto a la cocina—y a muchas otras cosas que ahora no vienen al caso—se ofreció a hacerse cargo de la alimentación de Tita. Ella se consideraba la más capacitada para “formarle el estómago a la inocente criaturita”, a pesar de que nunca se casó ni tuvo hijos. Ni siquiera sabía leer ni escribir, pero eso sí sobre cocina tenía tan profundos conocimientos como la que más. (Esquivel 14)

Because of the shock [of her husband's death], Mamá Elena stopped producing breast milk. Since back then there was no baby formula or anything like that and they could not find a wet nurse, they had a really hard time trying to feed the little girl. Nacha, that was extremely knowledgeable in the kitchen—and in many other things that are irrelevant right now—offered herself to be in charge of feeding Tita. She considered herself the most qualified to “mold the poor creature's stomach,” even though she never married or had children. She did not even know how to read or write, but she was an expert in the kitchen.

Nacha, a woman of indigenous descent without children of her own, becomes a mother to the newborn girl. As Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy state in their introduction to *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*, “Although giving birth is indeed a part of mothering, it is caregiving that *defines* the act of mothering, and caregiving is a choice open both to those who give birth and those who do not” (3-4). Nacha makes the decision to become the baby’s caregiver, and therefore, a substitute mother. Moreover, Nacha and Tita’s relationship starts even before the latter’s birth as the former is able to establish communication with the unborn child: “Dicen que Tita era tan sensible que desde que estaba en el vientre de mi bisabuela lloraba y lloraba cuando ésta picaba cebolla; su llanto era tan fuerte que Nacha, la cocinera de la casa, que era medio sorda, lo escuchaba sin esforzarse” (13). Not only does Nacha provide the emotional support that Mamá Elena denies her, but she is also a wise counselor who guides her even after her physical death. Even though Nacha dies early in the story, Tita feels her presence throughout her life especially when she needs guidance. Interestingly, Mamá Elena appears to Tita after passing. Her return, however, is not to comfort her daughter but to serve as a threatening conscience.

Nacha’s caring nature stands in sharp contrast with Mamá Elena’s iron fist. The matriarch is determined to raise a family with the highest moral standards and she is especially rigid with her youngest daughter. Faced with the death of her husband, Mamá Elena replaces his authority figure by performing the role of the patriarch of the family. As such, she is responsible for the safety of her family members as well as their economic well-being. Moreover, Mamá Elena becomes the guardian of the family’s good name. The matriarch/patriarch of the family rules with an iron fist and is especially strict with Tita.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler establishes gender as a social construction. As such, traits typically associated with males and females can easily be challenged. Gender categories are flexible and fluid. Mamá Elena's place in her family as the head of household does not conform to her expected role as a nurturing mother. When faced with the death of her husband, Mamá Elena's already aggressive personality takes on even more characteristics typically associated with an authoritarian patriarch. Early on in the story Mamá Elena establishes herself as a patriarchal mother.

The conflictive nature of the mother/daughter relationship between Mamá Elena and Tita, results, on the one hand, in a definite break in all communication between the two women, and, on the other hand, on an even closer relationship with Nacha. The stark contrast between the two mother figures could not be more evident than when Mamá Elena forces Tita to be in charge of the preparations for her sister Rosaura's wedding to her former boyfriend, Pedro.

Desde que se fijó la boda para el 12 de enero se mandaron comprar doscientos pollos a los que se les practicó la operación y se pusieron a engorda de inmediato.

Las encargadas de esta labor fueron Tita y Nacha. Nacha por su experiencia y Tita como castigo por no haber querido estar presente el día en que fueron a pedir la mano de su hermana Rosaura, pretextando una jaqueca.

-No voy a permitir tus desmandadas—le dijo Mamá Elena—ni voy a permitir que le arruines a tu hermana su boda, con tu actitud de víctima. Desde ahora te vas a encargar de los preparativos para el banquete y cuidadito y yo te vea una mala cara o una lágrima, ¿me oíste? (34)

When the date for the wedding was set to January 12, 200 chickens were bought and immediately castrated.

The people in charge of this work were Tita and Nacha. Nacha because of her experience and Tita as a punishment for not having attended Rosaura's engagement ceremony, saying that she had a headache.

-I will not allow your misbehaving—Mamá Elena told her—or will I allow that you ruin your sister's wedding with your victim attitude. From now on you will be in charge of the preparations for the wedding banquet and I better not see a tear or a sour face, you hear?

Nacha, understanding the difficulty of the task imposed on Tita, offers her love and compassion.

Nacha se dio cuenta de que Tita estaba mal, cuando ésta le preguntó si no le iba a poner el carmín.

-Mi niña, se lo acabo de poner, ¿no ves el color rosado que tiene?

-No...

-Vete a dormir niña, yo termino el turrón. Sólo las ollas saben los hervores de su caldo, pero yo adivino los tuyos, y ya deja de llorar, que me estás mojando el fondant y no va a servir, anda, ya vete.

Nacha cubrió de besos a Tita y la empujó fuera de la cocina. No se explicaba de dónde había sacado nuevas lágrimas, pero las había sacado y alterado con ellas la textura del turrón. (41)

Nacha realized that Tita was not doing well when she asked her about adding the red food coloring.

-My dear, I just added it, don't you see it looks pink?

-No...

-Go to sleep, mi child, I will finish the candy. Only you know your sorrows, but I can sense them. Stop crying. You are ruining the fondant. Go already.

While Mamá Elena treats Tita coldly, Nacha's attitude towards the latter agrees with that of a typical mother. Having established herself as the family's "masculine" matriarch, Mamá Elena's relationship with deteriorates to the point where the two women end communication. Tita's relationship with her nanny, Nacha, however, grows stronger throughout their time spent in the kitchen and even beyond Nacha's death.

In another example of patriarchal motherhood, Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* places sexual discrimination against daughters as one of the issues at the core of the novel. The bond between mother/daughter seems impossible due the former's obvious predilection for her son. The daughter is placed under the care of an indigenous nanny who after predicting a fatal end to the son, get fired.¹² Her dismissal from work, however, goes beyond her "superstitious" statement. The indigenous nanny threatens the status quo of a wealthy Chiapas family by forming a strong bond with the little girl who ultimately would be the only inheritor to the family's name and assets.

Ahora vamos por la calle principal. En la acera opuesta camina una india. Cuando la veo me desprendo de la mano de Amalia y corro hacia ella, con los brazos abiertos. ¡Es mi nana! ¡Es mi nana! Pero la india me mira correr, imposible, y no hace un ademán de bienvenida. Camino lentamente, más lentamente hasta detenerme. Dejo caer los brazos, desalentada. Nunca, aunque

¹² Unlike the Argüellos' son, Mario, their daughter is not given a name in the novel.

yo la encuentre, podré reconocer a mi nana. Hace tanto tiempo que nos separaron. Además, todos los indios tienen la misma cara. (Castellanos 291)

Now we are walking down the main street. An indian woman walk in the sidewalk across from us. When I see her, I let go of Amalia's hand and I run towards her with open arms. It's my nanny, it's my nanny! But the indian sees me run towards her and does nothing to welcome me. I walk slowly until stopping myself. I let my arms fall, disheartened. Never, even if I find her will I be able to recognize my nanny. It has been such a long time that they separated us. Besides, all indians look the same.

The daughter's statement, at the end of the novel, is powerful as it illustrates not only the depth of the "mother"/daughter relationship of the little girl with her nanny, but it also clearly points to the impossibility of such a bond because of their racial/cultural/class divide. The absence of a mother figure goes beyond that of her biological mother and extends to the forceful separation of her "adopted" indigenous mother.

While it is clear that the nannies take the place of the mother in both *La "Flor de Lis,"* *Como agua para chocolate* and *Balún Canán*, it is important to note that the upper-class girls bond with their care-takers only to a certain point. That is, the substitute mother, that the nanny comes to represent, indicates a moment of resistance to the power of biological motherhood presented on both texts. The stories of Tita and the Argüello girl are stories that show a personal growth. The two girls grow up under the loving care of their nannies who supply the attention they lack from their mothers. However, when they reach young adulthood, they experience the loss of their "mothers." Nacha dies just when Tita suffers the loss of her first love. The

Argüello girl's nanny disappears after the family starts having trouble. In both cases the substitute mother disappears when the girls, if unconsciously, become aware of their class. At some point in the text the order must be re-established and the girls become the upper-class women whose responsibility is to preserve the *status quo*.

3.5 Transnational Motherhood

In an increasingly globalized economy the migration of women from developing to developed countries continues to grow. With women establishing themselves professionally, female labor from developing parts of the world is sought after for work that was previously performed by housewives. As such, immigrant women are hired to clean, cook, and care for children. In their introduction to *Global Woman: Nannies, Maid, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild note that:

To an extent the, the globalization of child care and housework brings the ambitious and independent women of the world together: the career-oriented upper-middle class women of an affluent nation and the striving woman from a crumbling Third World or postcommunist economy. Only it does not bring them together in the way the second-wave feminists in affluent countries once liked to imagine—as sisters and allies struggling to achieve common goals. Instead, they come together as mistress and maids, employer and employee, across a great divide of *privilege and opportunity*. (11, emphasis mine)

When performing domestic duties for pay, working class women from developing countries not only face the economic divide between them and their employers, but they also face a clearly marked racial/ethnic divide. Contemporary cultural representations of the immigrant women hired for domestic services show such divides.

While Mid-20th Century cultural production demonstrates a pattern of working-class female migration from rural areas to increasingly industrial cities, the cultural production of the turn of the century shows a move toward international migration. Walter Salles segment in the film *Paris, je t'aime*, "Loin du 16ème", shows the emotional consequences of "displaced" mothering. A Spanish-speaking young woman (presumably from Latin America) works as a housekeeper/nanny for an affluent French woman. The young woman must travel a long distance to get to her place of employment. Before leaving for work she places her infant son in a child-care facility. The scene demonstrates how the young woman feels emotionally distressed by separating herself from her crying son. Although the spectators do not hear her voice her suffering, her facial expressing and the tender manner in which she sings a Spanish lullaby to calm her baby, communicate her emotional struggle. Her job makes her impossible to care for her own child as mother would. She must leave him behind to go earn a living. Her upper-class counterpart similarly must leave her own baby behind in order to advance professionally with work outside the home. The difference between the two mothers is that the Latin American nanny cannot afford to hire someone else to offer personal care to her son, while the affluent French woman can afford to hire the services of an immigrant mother to keep a house and tenderly care for her child. The nanny, then, is unable to fulfill her role as a care-giver to her own infant son and such role is, if unwillingly, displaced onto another woman's infant son.

The anxiety and inner conflict caused by being separated from their children is a constant theme in contemporary cultural production of immigrant nannies. In Patricia Riggen's film *La misma luna*, a Mexican mother (Rosario) working in the United States as a housekeeper/nanny and her 9-year old son (Carlitos) experience the anxiety of separation. After being apart from each other for over 5 years, they finally reunite in the United States after Carlitos' long journey

to find his mother in Los Angeles. While longing to be with her son, Rosario tenderly cares for the Snyder child: picking him up from school and even tucking him in bed when his mother is out. On the inequalities faced by mothers who leave their children behind for work, Romero notes that:

Working mothers who leave their children behind to care for rich children cannot provide physical and emotional affection, afforded to their charges, for their own children: The use of material goods, financial assistance, and school tuition result in commodifying family relationships and motherhood. (“The Nanny” 845)

Because of her limited financial opportunities in Mexico, Rosario must sacrifice her ability to be physically present for her own child.

Mexican women who work as housekeepers/nannies have been represented widely in American popular culture. Much like African American working-class women, their Mexican and Chicana counterparts often perform domestic roles in the American mainstream imaginary. Romero discusses the role of the mammies in the American culture:

They were characterized as “eager and content to perform domestic tasks and other affective functions” for meager wages because of the intrinsic rewards they received rearing and caring for their children and those of their employers.

Mammies performed “tasks of domesticity and caring for the socialization and emotional needs of children and adult family members in her owner’s or employer’s family, while relegating the needs of her own family. (“The Nanny” 825)

Just like the mammies in American history, Latina nannies “gladly” and lovingly care for American children.

In Sergio Arau's film *A Day Without a Mexican*, the Mexican nanny Catalina (Cata) not only performs household duties for the Abercrombie family, but she also provides emotional care for their daughter. Cata functions as a substitute mother for the Anglo-American little girl preparing her for school and feeding her while her biological mother worries about her beauty regime.

The film questions the place of Latinos in American society in a humorous, yet essentialist, manner. When all Latinos disappear from California, the state goes into a crisis: California simply cannot function without the work done by Latinos. The mystery of the disappearance is solved when spectators learn that "Mexicans" have been abducted by real "aliens" after confusing their *sombreros* with UFOs. While Cata is considered a "normal" person (she works in the country legally and speaks English), her Mexican ancestry prevents her from being accepted into the mainstream. Cata represents a danger to the future of the United States because she is shaping it via her charge, the Abercrombie little girl. The little girl is so close to her "substitute" Mexican mother that when the latter disappears, the former takes charge of the kitchen preparing breakfast for her parents just like Cata would have done. In this film, therefore, Cata, as a "substitute" mother to an Anglo-American girl, poses a danger to society. She has the "power" to shape the little girl's view of the world and, therefore, her future decisions as an adult.

If *A Day Without a Mexican* exposes the complexity of immigrants' lives in the United States in a humorous and simplified manner, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* does so with a serious tone. His film underscores the conflicts within the family circle when faced with adversity. The three inter-woven story lines feature families from three continents undergoing serious inner conflicts. The film features a Moroccan family struggling financially while, at the

same time, facing the possibility of incest, a Japanese businessman whose deaf-mute daughter struggles to form meaningful emotional connections, and an American couple (Susan and Richard Jones) who embarks to Morocco to try to save their marriage leaving behind (in the U.S.) their two young children.

The Jones children (Mike and Debbie) are left, in California, to the care of their Mexican housekeeper/nanny Amelia. Amelia, a middle-aged woman, treats the Jones children as a traditional mother would. She lovingly tucks them in bed singing and talking to them in Spanish while their parents are away trying to resolve their marital problems. Amelia's presence in the Jones' home is one that offers comfort to both parents and children. Amelia's relationship with the children is clearly presented as a strong bond, as the children respond to their nanny's displays of affection. With respect to the desirability of immigrant nannies, Mary Romero notes:

Purchasing the caretaking and domestic labor of an immigrant woman, commodificates reproductive labor and reflects, reinforces, and intensifies social inequalities. The most burdensome mothering activities (such as cleaning, laundry, feeding babies and children, and chauffeuring children to their various scheduled activities) are shifted to the worker. Qualities of intensive mothering, such as sentimental value, nurturing, and intense emotional involvement, are not lost when caretaking work is shifted to an employee. Employers select immigrant caretakers on the basis of perceived "warmth," "love for children," and "naturalness in mothering." ("The Nanny" 835)

Interestingly, for all of Amelia's maternal love it cannot be fulfilled by providing it to her own children. When Susan Jones is shot in Morocco, Amelia's plans to attend her son's wedding in

Tijuana are suddenly in danger. Unable to find someone to take care of Mike and Debbie, Amelia decides to take them with her across the border so she can attend the wedding.

Once in Mexico, the Jones children easily adapt to the festive environment of the wedding and are shown playing and laughing with Mexican children. Mike and Debbie are so used to Amelia that they feel safe, even in a foreign environment, when they are with her. When questioned by the immigration officers at the border on their way back to the United States, it is Amelia who offers comfort to the scared children. While their parents try to sort out their problems by taking a trip abroad, it is Amelia who steps into the role of the loving mother to the American children.

Amelia, the Mexican “substitute” mother must return to Mexico so that Order can be restored in the American family. Amelia’s interaction with the children poses a threat to the status quo, and, therefore, the Mexican nanny is not allowed into the family again. While being under the supervision of her boss, Amelia is perfectly “accepted” into the family, but when she “steps” into the role of the mother by making decisions for the children, she becomes a threatening figure. After all, as Romero notes,

If mothering is directed toward assuring their child’s social and economic status in society—a society that is racist, capitalist, and patriarchal – then her goals are strengthened by employing a low wage, full-time or live-in immigrant woman. Conditions under which immigrant women of color are employed in private homes is structured by systems of privilege and, consequently, employers’ children are socialized into these norms and values. (287)

By taking them to Mexico without permission, Amelia appropriated them and such fact is not acceptable to the American society. Ironically, she who placed the family's needs before her own is sent back to the country she left with the hope of a better life for her and her family.

The transnational nanny enters the dynamics of a family in a society foreign to her and complements work of the nurturing mother. The fact that these nannies come from developing countries to serve in the "First World" makes it easy to associate them with characteristics attributed to the traditional mother. In contrast, the mothers they work for, stand as independent, working women.

CHAPTER 4

THE BORDERS OF CRIME AND GENDER IN *MAQUILADORA* CULTURAL PRODUCTION

4.1 Women's Work Outside the Home

The cultural manifestations of domestic spaces are more often than not associated with women. Not surprisingly, paid labor that happens in domestic spaces does little to shake the stability of a male-centered society. Women household workers in the domestic space replicate the power structure of society at large by performing the same traditionally “feminine” tasks that a housewife would carry out. It is true; however, that the articulation of such space representations and role performances affects women of different socioeconomic statuses differently. For upper-class women traditionally “feminine” spaces, such as the kitchen, offer the possibility of growth and fulfillment. When not having to satisfy basic necessities to survive, privileged women can move on to concentrating on their professional lives. The situation, however, is different for working-class women. Even when their domestic labor is paid, housework places them in a disadvantaged position as they are subjected to the performance of duties that society considers less prestigious. In order to gain independence and distance themselves from the oppressive domestic system, working-class women must seek employment outside the realm of the house. In the 21st century, *maquiladoras* represent a way of entering the work force, in a sphere other than domestic labor, for working-class women¹³.

4.2 Labor Migration: From the Center to the Border, From Center to Margin

¹³ The term *maquiladora* is used to refer to assembly plants operating along the Mexico-U.S. border. A high number of these plants, but not all, are owned by U.S. based companies. Its proximity with the U.S., an abundance of cheap labor, and a highly unregulated workplace makes the border a prime place for *maquiladoras* to operate. Most *maquiladora* workers are young women of reproductive age.

The changing face of the Mexican economy during the 20th century impacted not only the type of women's paid labor, but also the geographical places of work. While at the beginning of the century women migrated from rural areas in *provincia* to do domestic work in Mexico City, at the end of the century such pattern of migration changed drastically. With increased industrialization and the border as a key piece in an increasingly global economy, Mexico City has lessened as a center of active work life. The increased number of job opportunities along the border with the United States attracts both men and women from rural areas, especially in the southern areas of Mexico, to border cities. The migrants seek better employment opportunities. The migration of labor force from the center to the margins, however, is in itself problematic given the negative way in which borders are generally perceived.

In his topological study of border novels from the 19th century, Juan Bruce-Novoa, makes a clear distinction between the ideological place of the border for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans¹⁴. Bruce-Novoa states that the perception of the border differs depending on the conditions and background of the one telling the story. For the most part, for Mexicans the border is a flexible line that represents an entrance to a better economic life. For Chicanas/os, it is a place that clearly delimits the realities of a developed and a developing country, but it is also an imaginary place that allows for the creation of alternate identities. The border, according to Bruce-Novoa,

[...] presents a different image to different people according to the specifics of the occasion of perception. The same spot is experienced in dynamically different points in time, just as different points along the border are perceived differently in

¹⁴ In the notes to his article Bruce-Novoa explains that "topology is a branch of mathematics that investigates the properties of a geometric configuration that remain constant when the configuration is subjected to transformation." In his view, topology can be used to discuss how a vastly diverse place can have unity.

the same period of time. The object, the border, in the end, is one line, chartable is space and maps. Yet when specific images are picked out for observation, the forms they assume vary, twisting and transmuting under our gaze because they have undergone a shaping and reshaping already under the gaze and pen of different authors. (49)

The Mexico-U.S. border is a crucial economic and political point, and it is also a contested place that is viewed differently by people on both sides. The border, as a metaphor, on the one hand, represents a mythical place for Chicana/o culture; for *fronteriza* culture, on the other hand, the border stands as contested space where debates about the local and the global take root¹⁵. As opposed to Chicana/o view of the border as a mythical place, *fronteriza* culture sees the border much more as a tangible (even practical) space.

Living in the borders implies marginality. Furthermore, living in the borders means being marginalized by the culture(s) of the center(s). Since the border “subjects” cannot completely adhere to the norms of either of the two spaces that enclose them, the culture of the border is a problematic one. The “border” is a social construction since borders are not natural but, rather, created barriers that seek to contain. Because of such intention, “border” subjects both show resistance and pose a challenge to rigid categories. Borders are, then, places in which the culture of the marginalized manifests itself to create new contested territories. Thus, rigid borders become the fluid *borderlands* of which Gloria Anzaldúa writes.¹⁶

The U.S. – Mexico border, the once fluid point where two cultures intersected, is now an increasingly restricted zone that makes interactions not only difficult but also hostile. However,

¹⁵ I use the tem *fronteriza* to refer to border culture on the Mexican side.

¹⁶ Alejandro Lugo makes a clear distinction between *border* and *borderlands* with the former being a physical and the latter being a philosophical space in his “Theorizing Border Inspections.”

regardless of the rigidity of the physical *frontera*, the borderlands continue to be places of resistance and creation as they refuse to fully assimilate into either culture, thus creating their own particular one.

The borderlands far from being places with no culture are spaces in which the combination of many cultures, in turn, brings about new ones. People of the borderlands resist the idea of “cultural invisibility.” In order to be fully accepted as a citizen of any place, Renato Rosaldo argues in his *Culture and Truth*, one needs to give in to the “cultural” practices of the majority. If one refuses to become invisible (assimilated), the chances for mobility are few:

As one approaches the top rungs on the ladder of social mobility, however, the process of cultural stripping away, in which Mexican Indians and Filipino cultural minorities become incorporated into the nation-state as peasants and workers. Curiously enough, upward mobility appears to be at odds with a distinctive cultural identity. One achieves full citizenship in the nation-state by becoming a culturally blank slate. (201)

Rosaldo’s argument is a strong critique of the hegemony of the nation-state and, although he uses it to talk about the role of the ethnographer, his argument can be applied to the study of the borderlands. The “distinctiveness” with which borderlands subjects are seen is the result of being excluded from the center. Since borderlands subjects cannot fully identify with the dominant cultures that surround them, they retain their own hybrid culture as a form of resistance even at the cost of social immobility.

As Renato Rosaldo states “more often than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets, and eruptions of all kinds” (207). Social borders, according to Rosaldo,

[...] frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste. Along with “our” supposedly transparent cultural selves, such borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation. (208)

Borderlands, thus, are places in which diverse cultural practices intersect.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* offers a look at the South Texas borderlands. In her book she questions the idea of the validity, and rigidity of borders. Instead of positioning herself as a victim, she looks to the past, the present, and the future to assume an active position. As part of her project, she proposes a self-examination of the Chicano culture. She criticizes the oppression suffered by women by members of her own community. Also, because Anzaldúa understands the importance of thinking inclusively, she proposes a coalition between the Chicano and other communities in contact with it. Nevertheless, she states that in order to do participate successfully in such coalition, Chicanas must learn and appreciate their native roots. Anzaldúa’s text offers a view of the physical border of Mexico-South Texas that allows her to go beyond that geo-political space and explore issues of class, gender and racial oppression within both mainstream U.S. and Chicana/o communities.

The border is a contact zone where ideologies, cultures, roots, customs, languages, and sexual and political preferences meet. The border, however, occupies a paradoxical space: different groups are put in contact within its “limits” and, at the same time, those “limits” prevent the dialogue between the groups. The border is a contesting space. It is in the border where *mestizo* cultures challenge hegemony.

Anzaldúa presents her arguments about the *borderlands* departing from the geographical zone of northern Mexico and south Texas. It is from that zone of contact that she speaks about identity, language, and sexuality. As such, her work reflects the intimate contact between the cultures primarily present in her life: Mexican and U.S. culture. The border is presented as a space of counter hegemonic resistance.

In his “Of Other Spaces” Michel Foucault explains space as something in constant change and movement. According to Foucault, the perception of spaces changes according to the social and political situations of any given time. In his definition of space Foucault describes two main ideas: utopias and heterotopias. He describes utopias as non-existent places: “Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (24). A second group of spaces to which Foucault also refers is heterotopias:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (25)

In his discussion of heterotopias Foucault identifies two main ones: one of crisis and one of deviation. The heterotopias of crisis are those in which one experiences temporary rites such as adolescence, menstruation, and loss of virginity. However, according to Foucault those heterotopias disappear to give way to heterotopias of deviation. Those heterotopias are characterized as places that contain non-normative individuals. Foucault refers specifically to

psychiatric institutions and prisons. Because of its non-normative status, the geographical space of the Mexico-U.S. border supports the foucauldian theory of the heterotopias of deviation.

Until 1836 (year of its independence) Texas was a space inhabited by *mestizos/as* and *criollos/as*: the latter being the direct descendants Spaniards and the former being descendants from both indigenous people and Spaniards. While the then Mexican territory also had a large Anglo-American population, it was ruled by Mexicans. With the advent of Texas independence and its subsequent annexation to the United States, the cultural and political climate of the region changed dramatically. Suddenly *tejanos* were left with a new government and a new language in a space that they conceived as their own.¹⁷ Such occupation of a familiar space by a foreign culture brought confusion and discomfort among *tejanos*. The old heterotopia of northern Mexico becomes the heterotopia of the southern United States. Just as Foucault states, spaces change according to social and political movements; as such, it was necessary for Anglo-Texans to create a space in which to exert total control. Once the heterotopia was established, others were also “constructed” in *tejano* territory. South Texas became a heterotopia of deviation because it is mainly populated by *tejanos*. It is in that geographical space where the Other resides, and the Other is a socially, culturally, and economically oppressed being.

After the independence of Texas, the *tejanos* who decided to stay were promised that they could keep what was rightfully theirs. However, such promise was not kept. In his “The Regional and International Spatial Problematic,” Edward Soja explains the need for capitalist culture to create and maintain economically disadvantaged spaces:

The key point is that capitalism – or if one prefers, the normal activity of profit-seeking capitalists – intrinsically builds upon regional or spatial inequalities as a

¹⁷ Texans of Mexican descent.

necessary means for its continued survival. The very existence of capitalism presupposes the sustaining presence and vital instrumentality of geographically uneven development. (107)

The border thus becomes the “base” to the capitalist Anglo-American economy; and therefore, it remains largely undeveloped. Despite its many problems, the South Texas border is a fluid space, and it has, as such, the potential to challenge hegemony from the margins. As Soja states, marginal spaces have the potential to change:

A core country or core region within a country can become part of the periphery and an erstwhile periphery can become part of the core, just as individuals and families can shift from proletariat to bourgeoisie from one generation to another. The polarized structure at all scales is also blurred and mystified in its material forms, giving to actual social and spatial divisions of labor a more complex and finely grained segmentation. (111)

Soja’s theory of peripheral spaces occupying the center is precisely what border writers have done with their texts. That is, the border marginalizes them (or the center-culture marginalizes them because they are in/from the border) because they are not fully considered part of neither the Mexican nor the U.S. literary traditions.

If *Borderlands/La Frontera* establishes the bordelands as the ideal place to discuss a hybrid culture, María Novaro’s *El jardín del edén* (*The Garden of Eden*) advocates for a borderless space: a space that can freely be crossed without legal constraint as it engages in a discussion of border representation from various perspectives. The filmmaker, a Mexico City native, places her work on the geographical space of the Tijuana-San Ysidro border. Tijuana “the most visited city in the world,” as the welcome sign at the international bridge shown in the

film states, becomes the encounter site of characters searching for the missing pieces in their lives. As such, the geographical space of Tijuana becomes a metaphorical space that serves to link the stories told in the film while it specifies the particular meaning that the border has for each story. To show both how difficult, and how easy it is to cross borders Novaro presents the spectators with characters from both Mexico and the U.S. that interact at the border.

El jardín del edén tells the stories of three women who look to the Mexico-U.S. border to find the missing pieces in their lives. Additionally, the film presents the story of a fourth major character: Felipe, a young peasant man from *provincia* who travels to the border hoping to enter the United States. Interestingly, their developing identities are closely linked to their jobs. While each of their stories is worth exploring, as they play a central role on the film, what stands out the most in the movie is the obvious role of the border: the main character. It is noteworthy that the exact same geographical border (Tijuana) stands for extremely different meanings for each of the other main characters in the movie (the women). Jane is a white woman looking for the “authentic” Mexico through her work as a writer. Elizabeth (Liz) is a young single-mother Chicana who travels to the border to set up an exhibit on Chicano art and who searches in Tijuana for her Mexican roots. Serena is a young widow looking for better economic opportunities in the border; she has become the head of household and the border looks far more financially promising than her native state. For these three women the border city of Tijuana offers opportunities for exploring their own selves in order to come to terms with their identities. To each, the border presents itself as a dramatically different reality.

Exploring the metaphorical space of the border in search of female identities, Novaro’s film portrays the Mexico-U.S. border as a site of reconciliation. Far from characterizing it as a marginalized space, she presents it as the center to which diverse characters come in search of

their own reality. The filmmaker clearly poses such question throughout her film. In dealing with the image of the border, Novaro's film echoes the work of border critics like Gloria Anzaldúa but, at the same time, it differs from them in that she is not Chicana and she deals with the Mexican side of the border. María-Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba speaks of the difference between the two views: "When one examines studies on border literature, two very distinct perspectives come into view: the Mexican perspective, which focuses on the literature produced within the region, and the U.S. perspective which focuses on Chicano/a and Latin American literature" (147). In that sense, it could be argued that Novaro's work does not fall into the category of Mexican border "literature" but it, nonetheless, presents the border as a central character.

The Jane-Felipe story openly challenges the geographical border. Although his obvious reasons for trying to enter the United States are to find better economic opportunities, his "illegal" entrance into the country signals a clear threat to politically imposed borders. His conception of such spatial configuration as something fluid is evidenced when he fails to cross into the United States, and he is robbed and brutally beaten. Nonetheless, he tries his luck as soon as he recovers from his injuries. Felipe's second attempt is far more successful given his relationship with Jane. In her search for "mexicanidad," Jane quickly becomes Felipe's benefactor. In her role as his protector, she positions herself as the powerful element in the couple. It is this woman who, along with Felipe, challenges official immigration laws by helping Felipe enter the United States. The notion of border-crossing, however, represents a whole other reality for Jane than it does for Felipe. In his "Theorizing Border Inspections" Alejandro Lugo discusses how "at the border there is no tolerance for ambiguity: you either have papers or you don't; you either convince the INS office that you are 'American' or you do not" (358). Such a view of the border proves true

in the case of both Jane's and Felipe's different experiences when border-crossing. As Lugo states:

Nonetheless, those of us who have papers (who have 'legal residence'), who are American citizens (either naturalized or by birth), who are light-skinned, and who speak English (with or without an accent)- and even those who might be younger- do cross borders much more comfortably; especially when compared to those who do not have papers, those who are not American citizens, those of us who are dark-skinned, and those who do not speak English at all. (358-59)

Thus, Felipe who is dark-skinned and does not speak English would have never been able to convince an INS officer to grant him entrance to the U.S. However, when Jane smuggles him into the U.S. in the trunk of her car, she -a white American- has no trouble convincing INS officers of her U.S. citizenship, and of the fact that she is not bringing anything illegal with her despite the fact that she looks suspiciously nervous. As Carla Olson Buck notes:

Jane's exchange with the border guard during questioning about what she is bringing into the states from Mexico underscores the privilege that Jane's citizenship and ethnic identity provide her. In a very poor cover-up, she coyly replies that she is not bringing anything except what is in the back seat of the convertible. Even though she looks extremely suspicious with her bags piled in the back when she is driving a car with a huge trunk, Jane is allowed to pass through without suffering even a cursory inspection. (245)

Because of her "American" looks, Jane's entrance into the United States goes on without a problem even though she crosses the border with Felipe hidden in the trunk of her car. The issue of color discrimination by INS officials is obvious in this story.

Liz's story is one that seems to be in opposition with Anzaldúa's theories. As I mentioned above, for Anzaldúa Chicana/o culture is a hybrid of cultures such as Indigenous, Spanish, and Anglo-Saxon. For her, it is necessary to come to terms with each component of her identity. María Novaro, conversely, portrays Liz as a woman whose identity is incomplete. From her arrival in Tijuana, Liz displays a need to get the Mexican part of her identity validated in order to become whole.

Tijuana, a border city, presents itself as an ideal (edenic?) place for Liz to reaffirm her Mexican roots while still being in close contact with her familiar, North American reality. If Anzaldúa's work criticizes aspects of Mexican culture, in Novaro's work spectators can clearly see a romantization of it by way of Liz. Mexico, in Liz's eyes is the paradise to which one must return in order to find oneself. Yet, to arrive at that paradise one must pay for her previous "sins." In Liz's case she must "pay" for not being able to speak Spanish. In one telling scene of the film, a crying Liz tells Jane that she gave her daughter a Spanish name (Guadalupe) and she can't even pronounce it.

As a point of convergence, Novaro's border becomes the center. Tijuana goes from a marginal position in the national imaginary to a cultural, and economic center. In Serena's (the young widow) case, the border city provides a chance for her to support her children and become economically self-sufficient. Serena arrives to the border (the margins) from the geographic center of Mexico. It is in this "new" center that she opens up her photography studio and proves to be a successful entrepreneur. With her life now "centered" in Tijuana, her children, and herself, will become part of the "mestizo" (in Anzaldúa's sense) border culture. Towards the end of the film, for example, Serena watches her son and other children play baseball, although, "that they are playing baseball rather than soccer might be seen as another example of the colonizing

influence of the United States at the border” (Olson Buck 246). Interestingly, Serena’s reason for moving to the border is the fact that her husband was murdered.

4.3 The Juárez Murders

The publication Charles Bowden’s article on Ciudad Juárez in the December 1996 issue of *Harper’s Magazine* brought to international attention the problem of violence against working women in that border city. Since 1993 hundreds of young working-class women have disappeared, been raped, and murdered in the most violent ways. These murdered young women are subjected to violent acts against their bodies before they brutally mutilate and murder them. Although work has been done in trying to clear the hundreds of murders of young women, most of whom are *maquiladora* workers, authorities have not come to a consensus as to who the perpetrators are or even what the motives may be. Moreover, the Mexican government has placed little effort in clearing the disappearances/murders. Local authorities blame the crimes on the victims themselves by flagrantly attacking their “moral” values. High officials in the Chihuahua government have gone as far as to declare that only “bad citizens” who are looking for trouble are out on the streets late at night¹⁸. In her “Public Women, Profit, and Femicide in Northern Mexico,” Melissa Wright discusses the conservative view that women who participate in the public sphere (via work or social activism), are equated to prostitutes (“public women”) and, therefore, the crimes against working women are not only minimized but also justified:

In blaming the victims for provoking the violence that they have suffered and, thereby, for not being “innocent” victims, these leaders reproduce the subject of the public woman as the source of the problem; for this reason, they suggest, no one should be surprised when a prostitute is raped, beaten, or murdered. Indeed,

¹⁸ Chihuahua governor, Francisco Barrio, in a television interview shown in Lourdes Portillos’s *Señorita Extraviada*.

this discourse normalizes such violence by producing the prostitute as the site of normalized rape, torture, and murder. She is guilty of her own crime. She, not the perpetrator is in fact the criminal. (686)

By placing the blame on the victims, the government frees itself from the responsibility of securing the well-being of all citizens.

Despite the growing number of disappearances, these remain a problem to which authorities have paid little attention. Even though these crimes are occurring along the border, the United States government has not participated aggressively in stopping the femicides. According to Charles Bowden neither the U.S. government nor its citizens care about the violent climate in Juárez:

We tell ourselves that there are gangs and murders in American cities. This is true, but it does not deal with the reality of Juárez. We are not talking about darkness on the edge of town or a bad neighborhood. We are talking about an entire city woven out of violence. We tell ourselves that jobs in the *maquiladoras* are better than nothing. But we ignore the low wages, high turnover, and shacks.

Then there is the thought: after all, they are Mexicans, not U.S. citizens. (51)

Although violence against women, and in particular the femicides, have been given low priority among authorities, they have received a good deal of international attention as reflected in the production of films, books, and articles in the past decade by filmmakers, scholars, and social activists in both Mexico and the United States.

In recent years, the Juárez murders have attracted international attention. As in any significant period in the history of a country, the femicides are currently being explored by writers in both Mexico and the United States. In 1998, a group of Juárez-based women writers

(the “S” Taller de Narrativa de Ciudad Juárez) collaborated in a volume that, for the first time, addressed the disappearances and murders of young women in the border city. *La voz que el silencio de todas quiebra: Mujeres y Víctimas de Ciudad Juárez* celebrates the lives of seven young women while it tries to shed light on the hundreds of murders occurred from 1993-1998 in Juárez. In the U.S. the topic was taken on by Lourdes Portillo in her *Señorita Extraviada* (2000). Portillo’s documentary offers a visually “crude” account of the murders and disappearances in which spectators are alerted to the magnitude of the crimes and the lack of official interest in clearing them.

In her *Señorita Extraviada*, Chicana filmmaker Portillo exposes the findings of her investigations about the murders of young women in Ciudad Juárez. Her documentary opens with the testimony of a mother whose daughter has disappeared. But instead of starting out by talking about her daughter, the woman in front of the camera speaks of her own history with violence. Through her words, the spectator learns that violence against women in the border city is not a recent issue, but rather a problem dating back years before NAFTA was signed¹⁹.

Globalization, of which NAFTA is a major player, however, as the documentary clearly states, has made it possible for even more violent acts against women to happen as borders become more fluid and work outside the domestic sphere becomes more readily available to women. In his article on *Señorita Extraviada*, Sergio de la Mora talks of the Juárez “war” against women:

Esta es una guerra de proporciones genocidas que está siendo emprendida contra uno de los sectores más olvidados de México, las mujeres jóvenes, pobres y morenas que emigran de diferentes partes del país a Juárez atraídas por la

¹⁹ In 1994, Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada. The agreement would allow American companies open up business in Mexican territory with few, if any, restrictions.

perspectiva de empleo en uno de los centenares de *maquiladoras* que funcionan a lo largo de la frontera de México y Estados Unidos. (118)

This war of genocide proportions is being fought against one of the most disadvantaged factions of Mexico: poor, young, and brown women that migrate to Juárez from different parts of the country seduced by the hope of employment in one of the hundreds of *maquiladoras* operating along the Mexico-U.S. border.

As a result of NAFTA, the Mexico-U.S. border has become a key point for globalization. While many workers along the border recognize the importance of industrial work in their communities, more and more scholars are evaluating the results of such work in developing countries such as Mexico. Of NAFTA specifically, Claudia Sadowski-Smith writes:

While it has increased corporate profits, sown the seeds of a Mexican middle class, and transformed Mexico into the second largest U.S. trading partner, NAFTA has also created conditions under which a variety of long-term negative developments have become more pronounced. In the absence of enforceable labor, human rights, and environmental protections, NAFTA has contributed to a rise in environmental pollution, accelerated de-industrialization and job loss in the United States and Canada, and promoted a sharp drop in Canadian currency. The agreement has also set the context for the emergence of far inferior working conditions in the assembly factories of Mexican border towns, which, in turn, have evolved into transit points for a growing number of northbound immigrants.

(5)

Free trade agreements such as NAFTA allow for the industrialization of certain strategic places, but it does not offer the workers fair working conditions or pay. Women are particularly vulnerable to such unfair work practices as they occupy the majority of jobs in the *maquiladoras* in the many industrial parks along the Mexico - U.S. border.

The entrance of women into the “traditionally masculine” public sphere, however, is not an easy task as it challenges rigid notions of gender. When women enter the world of paid labor, the power dynamics between the sexes change radically. Women, who are traditionally seen as mere receptors of what men provide, become providers themselves by contributing to the family’s income. As a result of such change, patriarchal structures are threatened. In her study of *maquiladoras* from within the factories, María Patricia Fernández-Kelly, explains how a female *maquiladora* worker’s behavior challenges the patriarchal order of Mexican society:

Maquiladora workers have become notorious in that they challenge conventional mores and values regarding femininity. Concerns about young women’s morality, virtue, and sexual purity are, in part, reflections of widespread anxiety and fear that, as a result of wage earning, women may end up subverting the established order. (245)

By accessing economic power women become agents with the possibility of gaining total and complete independence. Nevertheless, just as in domestic work, paid labor produces different results for women of different social statuses. While upper-class women sometimes find liberation and personal fulfillment in work, working-class women must often deal with the many challenges (long hours, low pay, inadequate child care) of working for a wage. When a working-class woman works outside the domestic sphere she gains independence and freedom, but unlike upper-class women, the working-class woman is more vulnerable to societal “punishment” due

to her limited power. In the words of the Mexican writer Sabina Berman “In Mexico being a proletarian woman is a crime.”²⁰

4.4 “Mexico is the Backyard of the United States”

The rigorous investigative work done by both the S Taller de Narrativa de Ciudad Juárez and Lourdes Portillo, is shared by Sabina Berman who fictionalizes the tragic disappearances and murders of young women in Juárez in her film script *Backyard* (2005). And although Berman’s text is a work of fiction, she warns the readers that: “Las coincidencias de esta obra de ficción con hechos y personajes reales son propositivas.”²¹ [Coincidences in this work of fiction with actual facts and characters are done on purpose, and they are to be taken as a proposal] (180). In her *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda* Berman writes about Gina, a successful professional woman who is sexually liberated as well as economically independent. Because of Gina’s economic independence, she can easily end an unfulfilling relationship with her lover Adrian, pay tuition for her son at Harvard, and open up *maquiladora* with her business partners in Ciudad Juárez. In her *Backyard*, Berman revisits the subject of *maquiladoras* along the Mexico - U.S. border when she tells the story of Juanita, a young *maquiladora* worker who becomes another victim of the Juárez femicides. *Maquiladoras* on the Mexico-U.S. sit at the center of her story. The border city that Berman presents points to the feminization of border subjects while marking the border as a place that brings more sorrows than success to its new inhabitants from the Mexican southern provinces. The text problematizes the border metaphor by portraying how it fails Juana and Blanca, the main characters, who had placed a high value on their future via employment in Juárez. Thus, these characters that comes to the border in hopes

²⁰ Personal conversation with the writer at Miami University in October 2005.

²¹ “Propositiva” is not a word in the Spanish dictionary. Berman uses this neologism perhaps to confirm that the coincidences found in the play are done “on purpose” or that the play seeks to be a “proposal” to solving the murders.

of higher life standards and the enjoyment of modernity, find that economic advancement comes with the high price of life, freedom or professional integrity.

Backyard tells the story of the brave and honest Ciudad Juárez police officer Blanca Bravo. *Subcomandante* Bravo is committed to finding the perpetrators of the femicides and clearing the disappearances and deaths of the young women. Bravo's courage never weakens even when her efforts do not find support from higher officials in her corporation. Bravo, a professional woman, must deal with the issue of sexism in the workplace. At the same time that the readers learn about Bravo's professional life, they also learn about her personal life when her cousin Juanita is sent to Juárez to find employment. Like many young women from rural areas in southern Mexico, Juanita joins the thousands of *maquiladora* workers in the border. Her life changes drastically in a very short period of time. In the words of the writer, Juanita "se transforma de campesina a postmoderna en cuestión de semanas" (she goes from a peasant to a postmodern woman in a matter of weeks).²² Juanita arrives to the city as an obedient peasant and quickly becomes a sexually liberated *maquiladora* worker who likes dancing and flirting with men. When Juanita meets Cutberto, a young man from Veracruz, she almost immediately starts a relationship with him. For her, however, such relationship is more sexual than emotional as she seeks to fully explore her sexuality and not be tied down to a single man. When Juanita breaks up with Cutberto he reacts in a dramatic, but harmless, manner begging her to take him back. Seeing that Juanita will not go back with him, Cutberto follows the advice from the gang "Los nortños" to get Juanita back by force. His decision brings about events that end in Juanita's death and in important changes in his and Blanca's lives.

Given the lack of employment opportunities and their role of rural societies, women have limited choices in life. With the growth in the number of *maquiladoras* along the border

²² Personal conversation with the writer at Miami University in October 2005.

many families look to the north of the country to solve their economic problems. Working-class young women, on their part, are aware of their limited potential for growth if they stay in their native communities. Getting a paying job allows them not only to contribute to the families' economy but it also opens up the possibility of working towards improving their future. Because her life in the countryside offers limited options, Juana decides to join her cousins Blanca and Márgara in Juárez. Juanita looks up to Márgara who enjoys the fruits of her labor in her new border home. She looks to work in the city as a way to escape her almost predetermined future in her Tabasco hometown.

Far from being the stereotypical young woman from the Mexican country, Juana shows an awareness of her almost non-existent chances for advancement when she decides to leave her hometown in Tabasco. A conversation with her father demonstrates Juana's ambition. When her father warns her about the dangers of the city the young woman's reply speaks to the undesirability of life in her town while it points to the progress that she perceives work in the border offers:

PADRE: Carajo, Juana, de veras no hay tanta necesidad de que te vayas.

JUANA: Ya sé, papá. Pero quiero alcanzar a Márgara. Qué tengo qué esperar aquí en el pueblo. Casarme y tener niños. Y eso sí me caso. Con la mitad de los hombres en los Estados Unidos o en la frontera, vamos a tener que compartírnos a los tres que quedan. (112)

FATHER: Damn, Juana, there is really no need to for you to leave.

JUANA: I know, dad. But, I want to catch up with Márgara. What is there for me in this town. Get married and have children. And that's if I get married.

With half the men in the United States or on the border, we'll have to share the three that are left.

Clearly Juana is aware of the limited possibilities of rural life for her, and it is the life of her cousins, Márgara and Blanca, in the border city that she finds appealing. Juana's desire to head for the northern border challenges the notion of passivity of Mexican women from rural settings. Juanita understands that she cannot achieve a better future if she stays in Tabasco forever. She knows that she needs to detach herself from her home community in order for her to grow.

Once in Juárez, Juana finds herself easily adjusted to her new environment. She moves in with her cousins and finds a job in a *maquiladora*. In just a few weeks Juanita's life is transformed so much that such changes are reflected in her personal appearance. Juanita adopts a new her hairstyle and new clothing and soon her image is no longer the one of the "traditional" girl from rural Mexico, but rather one that resembles that of Selena²³. The tejana singer, as Cherrie Moraga, states: "is the image of sexual liberation for Tejanas." Thus, following Selena's dress and hairstyle, Juanita too becomes a woman who is comfortable with her sexuality.

In addition to her new look, the border city also provides Juana the possibility of becoming sexually liberated. On a night out with her friends at the Noa Noa she meets Cutberto²⁴. Like her, Cutberto has come from Southern Mexico, Oaxaca, seeking better employment opportunities. Shortly after meeting Juanita and Cutberto become romantically and sexually involved. The use of the contraceptives provided by the *maquiladora* management allows Juana to experiment sexually without the concern of an unwanted pregnancy. Because of

²³ Selena Quintanilla-Pérez (1971-1995) was a Tejano singer who was murdered at the height of her fame and just prior to her "crossover" into mainstream American music. She became Mexicana/Tejana icon after her tragic death. Lourdes Portillo's *Corpus* examines Selena's influence in young Tejanas.

²⁴ The Noa Noa is a Ciudad Juárez bar made famous by the Mexican singer-songwriter Juan Gabriel. In the national imaginary the Noa Noa is a place where uninhibited behavior happens.

her independence and newly found sexual curiosity, Juanita wants to date other men. When Juanita tells Cutberto of her decision, he cannot understand her attitude since he wants to have a monogamous relationship with the young woman. He reacts in a sentimental way and even begs her to stay with him. Juanita, however is not persuaded by his tears and starts dating Sebastián, “el norteño.” Juana’s desire for sexual freedom is not something to be taken lightly. Although Cutberto’s intentions are to win Juanita over in a peaceful way, his masculinity is threatened by his ex-lover’s public displays of affection with another man in the same bar where they met. Just like Juana was transformed by the city, Cutberto is easily influenced by the gang “los norteños” to retaliate against Juana for her “loose” behavior. “Los norteños” convince Cutberto that Juana has humiliated him in public and for that she deserves a severe punishment. The group of men kidnaps, rapes, and kills Juana. Despite Cutberto’s desperate attempts for the men not to hurt Juana, they not only group rape her while she is unconscious, but they make him kill her:

NORTEÑO 4: Ahora te toca matarla.

CUTBERTO: No.

NORTEÑO 4: Si no es pregunta. Te toca matarla: si no, ¿cómo sabemos que no vas a traicionarnos cabrón?

CUTBERTO: No.

Dos minutos después. Una navaja corta el pezón izquierdo de Juana que despierta abriendo enormes los ojos.

Cutberto está con una bolsa de plástico chillando y el Norteño 4 tiene una pistola contra la nuca de Cutberto. (165)

NORTEÑO 4: Now it is your job to kill her.

CUTBERTO: No.

NORTEÑO 4: It is not a question. You have to kill her: if not, how do we know that you are not going to turn us in, asshole.

CUTBERTO: No.

Two minutes later. A knife cuts Juana's left nipple. She wakes up with eyes wide open.

Cutberto cries, holding a plastic bag and Norteño 4 presses a gun against Cutberto's nape

Just like Juana cannot escape the punishment for her sexual "deviance," Cutberto cannot escape the pressure to "act like a man" and becomes himself a victim of violence.

Juana's murder would have become another number in the long list of unresolved crimes against women in Juárez. However, because of Blanca's interest in solving such crimes and her position in the local police department, Juanita's murder is solved. Blanca Bravo gets a confession from Cutberto who confirms what happened to Juanita. Despite finding the perpetrators of the crime, Juana's kidnapping, rape, and murder point to the way in which violent crimes against women can be committed with impunity. The large number of murders and the many versions about the possible killers make it possible for anyone to violently attack women under the guise of a serial killer. When Juana's left nipple is cut off, "los nortños" would make it seem as if it were crime to be added to the list of the alleged serial killer.

Her work in the *maquiladora* provides Juana a way of gaining economic independence as well as sexual liberation. But because her behavior is considered to be outside the assigned female role in society, and she can access the same type of liberties as men, Juana is criminalized, seen as deviant, and ends up paying for her "subversive" conduct with her own life.

Backyard actively questions the contradictory way in which paid labor at the *maquiladoras* works for young working-class women whose bodies are physically punished for acting out their desires, and equally criminalized if they dare produce offspring. The young women's bodies, are thus, subjected to inspection, and their workplace becomes a place of total control over their lives. The assembly plant's "inspectors," the doctors, police the young women bodies and enforce their disposable status when they instruct them in the use of contraceptives:

DOCTOR: Aquí las chavas cambian sus costumbres, Juana. Se liberan, como dicen. Tienen su dinero y toman sus decisiones. Sobre todo cuando sus papás no están aquí.

JUANA: Sí, pero yo no voy a embarazarme a lo buey.

DOCTOR: Por eso. Es para no embarazarte a lo buey Juana. Bueno, si decides iniciar tu vida sexual, antes vienes a consultarme. No al día siguiente: antes. ¿Entendiste?

JUANA: ...

DOCTOR: Cada mes te voy a aplicar una pruebita para ver si estas embarazada. Si estás embarazada pierdes tu trabajo. ¿Entendiste Juana?

Juana no entendió y se esfuerza en entender. (122)

MEDICAL DOCTOR: Once they get here young women change their ways, Juana. They liberate themselves, as they say. They have their own money and they make decisions; especially when their parents are not here.

JUANA: Yes, but I am not going to be stupid and get pregnant.

MEDICAL DOCTOR: That's why. This is so that you don't get pregnant.

Anyway, if you do decide to become sexually active come see me first. Do not come the day after, come see me before. Understand?

JUANA:...

MEDICAL DOCTOR: Every month I will give you a simple test to see if you are pregnant. If you are, you will lose your job. Do you understand Juana?

Juana did not understand and she struggles to do so.

Contraceptives and the close monitoring of her sexual activity work in the text in two levels: on one side they allow Juana to become a sexual subject, but, on the other hand, they act as oppressors as they are imposed on her rather than sought by her. Her sexual "liberation" is a direct result of the policing of her body.

Juana's characterization as a young woman from the south that comes to the north to become independent deserves a closer look as it points to the over-sexualization of the *maquiladora* women. Juanita's self-discovery as a sexual being is accompanied by a re-definition of femininity based on her new life in the city. Once she enters the job market, she is encouraged to change her physical appearance so not to look "Indian."

While Berman's portrayal of such a spirited young rural woman is praise-worthy it also points to the romantization of life in the countryside. After all, it is her because of her "adventurous" behavior that Juanita ends up dead. The writer's resolution to the climax of the story suggests that the passive behavior of rural women will keep them from the dangers of industrialized societies, and that if Juanita would have accepted her future as a wife and mother she would not have fallen victim to violence to her body. Much as Poniatowska idealizes the life of the domestic workers in their native communities and states that they lose their identity once

in the city in her introduction to *Se necesita muchacha*, Berman's text points to the dangers of urban life as it teaches a lesson to ambitious young women²⁵. Berman's work, nevertheless, differs, I argue, from that of Poniatowska's in that she presents Juanita's punishment to criticize a society that still oppresses women regardless of the geographical space in which they live. On one hand, Juanita's options are almost non-existent in the countryside, and, on the other hand, her apparent many possibilities in the city are not real as she is physically abused and murdered as a result of her wanting to assert her independence. Because she is a woman who earns her own money and does not depend on a man, financially or otherwise, to support her, she presents a danger to the patriarchal structure of Juárez society. If she can take care of herself she is invading the masculine space thus threatening male privileged position. Her independence endangers his role as a provider, so she must be punished for her daring behavior.

Just like women are the victims of violence, working-class men cannot escape the cycle of violence both as victims and perpetrators. Cutberto's masculinity is questioned when he behaves as a sensitive and considerate man, and he is made to act violently against Juanita to demonstrate that he is "truly" a man. When Juana decides to break up with him, he pleads with her not to do it:

CUTBERTO: Pero en que falle caramba.

JUANA: En nada. Es que... Yo quiero conocer gente Cut.

CUTBERTO: Eso se llama de otra manera Juana.

JUANA: Si me vas a faltar al respeto me voy.

CUTBERTO: No pérate pérate pérate. (156-57)

²⁵ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

CUTBERTO: But, what did I do wrong?

JUANA: Nothing. It's just that... I want to meet other people, Cut.

CUTBERTO: That's called something else, Juana.

JUANA: If you are going to insult me I'd better leave.

CUTBERTO: No wait, wait, wait.

Far from reacting in a violent way, Cutberto reacts in a sentimental manner, trying to make sense of Juana's decision. In this case it is he who wants an exclusive relationship while Juana prefers not to be tied to anyone in particular. In his "The Moon and the Gutter: Border, Women and Migration," Rolando Romero argues that the migrant text emasculates the male migrant subject while it enables women to become independent and accepted since immigration is already "feminized" (99). Moreover, when speaking of his analysis of Puerto Rican migration, Romero states:

My argument regarding Puerto Rican nationalistic rhetoric, which associates castration with cultural identity, thus ties the anxiety of "loss" of culture (a sort of cultural castration) back to the figure of woman. If males understand sexual difference by projecting "lack" into women, male authors also understand cultural difference in a similar process. Authors project their own cultural fears back to the figure of woman as lack. This process explains the "feminization" so common when literature focuses on the contact with the Other. The migrant in effect, comes to "lack" his own masculinity, a crippling state in a patriarchal culture. (102)

While *Backyard* was certainly not written by a male author, Cutberto's emasculation works in a very similar way. Once he is stripped of his masculinity, he acts violently against the body of

Juanita. To avoid his own “castration” he symbolically “castrates” Juanita when he cuts off her nipple.

If Cutberto’s masculinity is taken from him once he migrates to the border, it is two female characters that show “phallic” qualities in the text: Ester Chávez, director of Casa Amiga and *Subcomandante* Blanca Bravo.²⁶ At the beginning of the story readers encounter Ester, who is described as a woman of more than 70 years of age who is “menudita, frágil de apariencia, y con una energía de ciclón; caucásica, vestida en blazer y pantalones, sandalias, y con lentes Rayban, entintados suavemente” (petite, of fragile appearance, and an energy reminiscing of a cyclone; Caucasian, dressed in a blazer and pants, sandals, and lightly tinted Rayban sunglasses), just when she is getting ready to retire and move to the United States to live with her sister. Ester is a fierce advocate of battered women and an activist for justice to the dead women. In her fierce determination to fight for the rights of women, she puts together her own file with information on all dead and disappeared women in Juárez. When she recognizes the body of a young woman who she had helped at Casa Amiga, she proceeds to meet with *Subcomandante* Bravo to inform her of the woman’s identity. In their meeting, she clearly states her disappointment at the negligence of the authorities that Bravo represents:

BLANCA: ¿Quiere parar un momento?

ESTER: Estoy llorando de rabia.

BLANCA: Por eso: paramos un momento.

ESTER: Cuando lloro pienso mejor. ¿Pero para qué hablamos? Ustedes no van a hacer nada. Van 136 muertas y no han hecho absolutamente nada. No hay un solo preso. Esto es una burla a las muertas. (116)

²⁶ Casa Amiga is an actual center for battered women in Ciudad Juárez.

BLANCA: Do you want to stop for a moment?

ESTER: I'm crying out of rage

BLANCA: That's why. We can stop for a moment.

ESTER: I think better when I cry. But, what's the point of talking? You are not going to do anything. There are 136 dead women and you have done absolutely nothing. There isn't one single suspect. It is a joke.

Ester's rage at yet another dead woman contrasts with the passivity with which the police deal with the murders. Contrary to the lack of a formal file for the murders by the police, Ester is familiar with every single murder. It is because of her interview with Bravo that they are able to trace el Sultan who is a crime suspect.

Despite the lack of official interest in clearing the murders, *Subcomandante* Bravo is determined not only to solve them but to put an end to them. Interestingly it is Blanca Bravo who demonstrates more courage and integrity than any of the male police officers in the story. If Ester shows "masculine" characteristics by commanding authority and protecting young women at the shelter, *Subcomandante* Bravo's personality and line of work takes the idea of the "phallic" woman to the limit by exhibiting traits closely related to traditional masculinity.

While Bravo's strategy to incarcerate one of the main suspects of the crimes, el Sultan, it is not legal (as she plants evidence to inculcate him), her actions demonstrate that she knows how to play the power game in order to achieve justice. Later, when she finds out of Cutberto's involvement in her cousin's death, her "masculine" personality comes up again when confronting him:

Blanca le apunta con un revólver.

BLANCA: Ahora quiero la verdad. De todos modos te voy a matar. Pero antes quiero saber quiénes eran los que la violaron contigo. (*Cutberto la mira.*) Te voy a matar, ni lo dudes. Ojo por ojo. (*Cutberto la mira.*) Márgara. Traete mi block de la cocina y mi pluma. (*Márgara obedece. Va por ellos. Los trae.*) Apunta los nombres. ¿Cuántos eran?

CUTBERTO: Seis y yo. Pero yo no la maté. Era otro el plan. Sólo quería...Era... (167)

Blanca points a gun to him.

BLANCA: Now I want the truth. I am going to kill you anyway. But before I do, I want to know who raped her with you. (*Cutberto looks at her.*) I am going to kill you. I am not joking. An eye for an eye. (*Cutberto looks at her.*) Márgara. Go get my writing pad and my pen. (*Márgara obeys her. Goes to get them.*) Write down the names. How many were they?

CUTBERTO: Six and I. But I did not kill her. That was not the plan. I only wanted to... It was to..

Thus, while the border feminizes men and victimizes women, Berman shows that working-class women can successfully survive violence if only by exhibiting “male” traits. And even then the women who “dare” destabilize the hegemonic order, and live to tell, are forced to emigrate from the border to either Mexican *provincia* or the United States. It is as if the border provided an unredeemable space. The border has no salvation and, therefore, people should never migrate to its cities. People are much safer in their native environments even they provide almost no alternatives to fulfill basic survival needs.

While globalization, via NAFTA, opened up new places of employment for thousands of workers, such change in the local economy also “opened up” the door to serious problems affecting women in particular and the whole community in general. Historically, border cities are thought of as undesirable places (as in the recent *Brokeback Mountain*) where people go to do the things they are not “allowed” to do in their own countries or cities such as hire prostitutes or get drunk in public²⁷. With regards to the representation of the border in texts by Anglo-American writers, Rolando Romero argues in his “Border of Fear, Border of Desire” that:

In these narrations the border fosters disease, rape, prostitution, drugs, and contamination. Contemporary narrations of the border imply that one can buy babies or drugs from the *coyotes* as easily as one can buy entrance into the US. These narrations are constructed in order to justify the “purification” of the nation/self which usually follows. (38)

In the view of Mexican citizens, however, the many new transnational companies that established assembly plants in Juárez brought violence along with their low wages. As Peralta, a local journalist and radio personality in Berman’s *Backyard*, clearly states in his radio show:

PERALTA (V.O.): Así provincia chula nunca fue Juárez. Pero ni qué alegar que ahora sí se nos sobrecomplicó. Llegaron las *maquiladoras* por la mano de obra barata. Llegaron y siguen llegando las pueblerinas a trabajar en la maquila. Llegaron los narcos y su violencia, a cruzar por aquí la frontera hacia los United. ...Llegó la prostitución. Y al final, para coronar el desmadre, llegaron las muertas. Bonito traspatio de dos entradas es Juárez: de los United y de México. (110)

²⁷ In this 2005 film a border city is shown as the place where Jack, a homosexual cowboy, goes to drink and to find sexual encounters. The border is presented as a place of vice and excess as Jack freely roams the streets in a clearly drunken state.

PERALTA (V.O.): Juárez was never a pretty provincial town. But, it is undisputable that things got more complicated now. *Maquiladoras* arrived looking for cheap labor. Small town girls came in and continue to come to work in the *maquiladoras*. The drug lords arrived with their violence to cross the border into the United States.

...Prostitution arrived. And, at the end, to crown the whole mess, the dead women arrived. Beautiful backyard of two entrances is Juárez: of the United States and of Mexico.

Maquiladoras are, thus, seen as more of a curse than a blessing. Peralta's statements directed to the masses capture the tone of Berman's text while they expose the harsh reality for the young women workers who come to Juárez in search of better economic opportunities.

Sagrario González Flores, tells Isabel Velázquez, and her family came to Juárez looking for employment when life in their native Durango became hard as a result of the lack of employment. Once in the city, like many other young women, Sagrario and her sisters quickly began working in the *maquiladoras*. Despite finding employment, their life in Juárez was not as they had imagined it:

Para hacer las cosas más difíciles, el terreno que les habían prometido no estaba siquiera en Lomas de Poleo, sino en lo que los residentes del lugar llaman *la planta alta*, una meseta en lo alto de un cerro, a la que se llega después de caminar medio hora si no se tiene carro. Fueron los tiempos en los que sobrevivieron gracias a la unión, al ingenio y a la solidaridad de los vecinos del lugar. (Velázquez 91)

To make the matters worse, the lot that they have been promised was not even in *Lomas de Poleo*, but in a plateau in the top of a hill that can only be reached after a half-hour walk if one does not have a car. During those times they survived thanks to their unity, wit, and the neighbor's solidarity.

Her family improved their quality of life little by little, and the youngest siblings attended school. Sagrario herself attended school while she worked at the *maquiladoras*. Sagrario had dreams of drastically improving her family's financial situation by way of her studies and hard work, but her dreams were shattered when, in 1998, she became a number in the long list of women murdered in Juárez.

Although the state government is aware of the crimes against women being perpetrated in Juárez, and it knows how to help put an end to the murders, government officials in Berman's text fear the consequences of the *maquiladoras* taking their business to more profitable places. When the Chihuahua Governor suggests that the *maquiladoras* do their part in preventing the murders, the President of the *Maquiladora* Association's reply shows a total disinterest in the young women's lives:

GOBERNADOR: Para parar las muertas necesitamos alumbrado público en todo Juárez. Transporte público. Y multiplicar y elevar la calidad de los elementos de la policía. (*Silencio en que escucha. Se va irritando a su vez.*) Sí, sí. Pero para hacerlo nosotros el Gobierno solos, tendríamos que vaciar las arcas del erario. Creo que si las *maquiladoras* cooperan... (*Lo han interrumpido.*)

INT. OFICINA DE LA AMAC. DÍA.

ING. ALVAREZ: Estamos en Juárez porque es mano de obra barata, señor Gobernador. Es evidente que si deja de ser barata, nos vamos a Beijing, a República Dominicana, a Filipinas. Es muy simple lo que le pido. (Berman 111)

GOVERNOR: To stop the murders we need street lighting in all of Juárez. Public transportation, and to multiply and improve the quality of police officers. (*Silence while he listens. He starts to get irritated.*) Yes, yes. But for government to do it on our own we would have to use all of our resources. I think that if *maquiladoras* cooperated... (*He has been interrupted.*)

INTERIOR. AMAC OFFICE. DAY²⁸.

ENGINEER ALVAREZ: We are in Juárez because of cheap labor, Mr. Governor. It is evident that if it stops being cheap we will relocate to Beijing, Dominican Republic, the Philippines. I am asking for something very simple.

As a result, the Governor would rather please the big corporations that do not want to have their names associated with the murders, than demand a safer environment for the thousands of *obreras* working at the assembly plants. For the government it is vital to prevent the *maquiladoras* from leaving the city as it would cost a big loss for the state's revenue.

Ultimately, the thousands of workers are not only performing everyday mechanical work with little or no benefits, but they are also regarded as disposable labor. The lives of a "few" women are irrelevant because more young females arrive at the border city daily.

Berman's text takes into account the many "characters" involved in the Juárez murders. That is, the writer presents the negligence of the government while at the same time, presenting

²⁸ Spanish acronym for Asociacion de Maquiladoras, A.C. (Maquiladoras Association)

the work of individuals such as Ester Chávez, Casa Amiga to solve and stop the crimes. At the same time, Berman's text exposes the corruption in both the government directly, and in the police force. She shows how the institution that it supposed to protect the citizens actually acts as an accomplice to the murders and as a puppet to the government.

The environmental abuse suffered by border cities, as evidences in the industrial waste that contaminates the river and the desert, extends to the abuse of human beings; females, as Isabel Velázquez states, are constantly disrespected:

Mija, mamacita, madrecita, ruca, buenota, culote, pinche vieja, chola, naca, lomera, puta, india... las palabras están ahí, en todas las calles y todas las colonias, para nombrar una realidad presente en los ámbitos público y privado: en Ciudad Juárez es socialmente aceptado agredir verbalmente a la mujer y particularmente, a la mujer pobre. (96)

Baby, hot momma, fucking bitch, big ass, whore, Indian... the words are there in the streets and in every *colonia* to name a reality present in both the public and private spheres: in Juárez it is socially accepted to verbally attack women, particularly poor women.

An analysis of the three main characters in Berman's text points to the emasculation-feminization of the border city. Once the border is feminine, it is much easier and justifiable to abuse and violate her.

4.5 The Impossibility of Motherhood

In her *Desert Blood*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba explores the issue of the Juárez murders from a Chicana perspective, and at the same time questions the fluidity of the border when the victim

is a U.S. citizen of Mexican descent. Her novel questions the notions of citizenship in the borderlands and how it specifically affects women. Additionally, Gaspar de Alba's text represents a well-documented account of the crimes that exposes the complicities between perpetrators and law-enforcement authorities along the border.

The notion of the border as both rigid and fluid manifests itself in the text when Ivon's sister Irene disappears after her visit to the *feria* (the state fair) in Juárez. While U.S. authorities can't do anything about Irene's disappearance because the incident happened in the Mexican side, her kidnappers bring her into the U.S. with no problem.

But perhaps the most significant issue in *Desert Blood* is the right to motherhood by brown women both Mexican and Chicanas. Ivon Villa, lesbian professor of Women's Studies in California decides to adopt a Mexican baby with her partner Bridgit. In order to finalize the adoption process and to pick up the newborn, Ivon travels to her hometown of El Paso to adopt Cecilia's, a young *maquiladora* worker, baby. The adoption however, falls through when Cecilia's body is found with the baby carved out of her stomach. Ivon, who is writing a doctoral dissertation, decides that there is no point in her staying in El Paso near her disapproving mother if she won't get the baby. Irene, her teenage sister, looks up to Ivon and wants to spend time with her. During her stay in El Paso, Ivon learns a good deal about the femicides by talking to local activists and by her own sister's disappearance in Juárez.

Gaspar de Alba's text presents the impossibility of motherhood for those in the margins of society. Cecilia is an "other" because of her status as an unwed mother, a working-class woman who is prohibited by her work to become pregnant under the threat of losing her job in the *maquiladora*. Her body, penalized for producing offspring, is allowed only to "produce" the electronics she assembles at the factory. The *maquiladora* worker, thus, is equated to a machine

that must produce goods to satisfy the needs and desires of “First World” consumers. For these young women with limited power, the “production” of human beings is one way of exerting power. Their bodies, however, are seen as threats because what they can potentially produce thinking, enunciating subjects:

“The girl’s been wearing a girdle, you know, so they can’t tell she’s pregnant or else she’ll get fired. She stands up all day at the factory, and it’s made the baby ride too low, or something like that. But like I said, Cecilia’s fine, it’s all good.”

“She’ll get fired if she’s pregnant?”

Ximena turned to look at Ivon. “Well, yeah, the factory would have to pay maternity leave that would cut into its profits. Take your birth control if you want to keep your job.” (Gaspar de Alba 11-12)

The American professional, Ivon, finds the thought of workers not getting basic benefits such as maternity leave hard to understand. However, the their sexual lives of Mexican workers in the *maquiladoras* are monitored to the point where they are given birth control pills upon being hired to work at the factories and even their menstrual cycles are subject to inspection. Being able to bear children (motherhood) might be the only power that the young *maquiladora* workers have. Therefore, such power must be controlled in order not to become a threat to hegemony (both in Mexico and the U.S.). Gaspar de Alba suggests that because these murders happen in the border, they are committed as a way of stopping the flow of “brown” immigration (illegal mothers, legal babies) to the U.S.

The impossibility of motherhood for border women happens not only before giving birth, but even after they have had children. Carlos Fuentes’ “Malintzin de las maquilas” offers a view of relationships between women at the workplace, and, and the same time, shows a group of

women workers who fail in their roles of mothers. Rosa Lupe must work to support her husband and children, thus becoming the head of household, the *jefecita de familia* (136). Candelaria, despite being in a relationship with a union leader, is also the breadwinner for her children and father. Both of these women fail to fulfill their motherly roles because of their work outside the home. Their male counterparts perform the “feminine” duties, such as child care and household maintenance, in the domestic sphere. Their work in the *maquiladoras* allows them certain degree of economic stability that, if limited, proves to be better than what the man can provide to the family.

Having to work long hours and with inadequate care for their children, *maquiladora* workers are often forced to leave their children unattended while they go to work or even when they go out with their friends. This child care “arrangement” contributes to the impossibility of motherhood for the young women. When Dinorah, a single mother, leaves her home alone to join her friends at a local club after a long week of work, she returns home only to find that her son has died. The child’s death works as a reminder of the impossibility of motherhood to the rest of the young women. Marina, who does not have any children, soon reacts with horror to Dinorah’s tragedy and decides that it is better not to have children:

Marina, llorando, sin saber como consolar a Dinorah, oyó al abuelo de Candelaria y dió gracias de que en su casa no había recuerdos, ella era sola y más valía seguir sola en esta vida que pasar las penas de las que tenían hijos y sufrían como la pobrecita de Dinorah, toda despeinada y escurrida y con el vestido rojo trepado hasta los muslos, arrugado, y con las rodillas juntas, y las piernas chuecas, ella tan cuidada y coqueta de por sí. (157)

Marina, crying, not knowing how to console Dinorah, hear Candelaria's grandfather and was thankful that in her house there were no memories, she was alone and it was better to continue living that way than to go through the sorrow that the ones that had children experienced, and to suffer like poor Dinorah, with her hair so messy and unkempt and with her wrinkled red dress up to her thighs, her knees together and her crooked legs; she always so neat and flirtatious.

Not being able to pay childcare for her son Dinorah must leave him home alone thus failing in her motherly duty of protecting her offspring. The border city, Juarez, offers her the possibility of work and income, but it also punishes her for "ambition." Dinorah's choice to leave her town for work in the city, along with her status as a single mother, causes her to become an unfit mother, as the old people in her *colonia* seem to think:

[...] el padre de la Candelaria, detenido en el quicio de la puerta, se preguntó en voz alta si habían hecho bien en venimos a trabajar a Juárez, donde una mujer tenía que dejar solo a un niño, amarrado como un animal a la pata de una mesa, el inocente, cómo no se iba a perjudicar, cómo no. Todos los rucos comentaron que eso en el campo no pasaría, las familias allí siempre tenían quien cuidara a los niños, no era necesario amarrarlos, las cuerdas eran para los perros y los marranos. (157)

[...] Candelaria's father, supporting himself in the hinge of the door, asked himself out loud if had done the right thing coming to work in Juarez where a woman had to leave a little boy tied to the foot of a table, the innocent, how was he not to hurt himself, how. All the old people said that would not happen in the

country. Families there always had someone to take care of the children; it was not necessary to tie them. Ropes were for dogs and pigs.

Candelaria's father equates life in Juarez with the death of the family. Paradoxically, it is in the city, where human beings have limited contact with animals, that humans become "animalized." Because the family is absent, women in the city are forced to leave their children unattended while countryside women usually have someone to look after theirs. Although Candelaria's father questions their decision of coming to the city, his questioning signals his understanding of the limited possibilities for women in the country.

Work in the *maquiladoras*, in the city, provides women with the economic opportunities not present in their communities. However, such economic "advancement" comes with the price of dehumanizing women, and also men. At the factories, workers "re-produce" only parts of a whole. They never see the finished product; they never enjoy the "fruit" of their work. As women, they are subjects of violence against their bodies in a space that pays little attention to crimes against them. Their bodies, and their sexuality, are always under the scrutiny of the "law." That is, their work supervisors act as oppressing agents that seek to control their bodies.

Despite being scrutinized and, therefore, stripped from complete control, women have the power of human reproduction. Such power, nevertheless, is also threatened by work in the *maquiladoras*. Women's power of producing human beings is taken away by several mechanisms including actual physical attacks, the threat of losing their jobs if they become pregnant, and the lack of adequate care for their children.

Maquiladora women in the border are only allowed to mechanically "re-produce" electronic parts to be shipped somewhere else where they will become a single product. They are, however, not allowed to reproduce: to create a complete "product." Being able to produce

human beings represents a danger to the stability of their line of work. As mothers, they would have to care and provide for their “product” and that would necessarily take away from their role as mere “re-producers” of non-human pieces. Thus, sexuality and motherhood must be controlled at all cost, so that it does not threaten the always privileged position of the assembly plants.

CONCLUSION

Domestic work and the issue of women working for other women is not only an uncomfortable topic for many feminist scholars, but altogether a blind spot in Mexican feminist thought. By the same token, second wave, middle-class, Euro-American feminists saw gender as the sole factor determining social inequality for women. I see the intersections of gender, class, and race/ethnicity as contributing elements to the inequities present in contemporary society as presented in Mexican literature and cultural production.

Although Mexican feminists in the 20th century argued for equality for women in the workplace, reproductive rights, and access to education, they often failed to engage working-class women in the discussion. Such exclusion extends beyond the sociopolitical sphere to reach the literary/cultural criticism circles. As a result, academic analyses of literary figures from lower socioeconomic status are rarely produced. Even though working-class characters are a constant presence in literature and cultural production, the complexities of their stories are often ignored.

The anxieties produced by working-class women performing domestic duties for professional women, is best explained by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. In the preface to her *Doméstica* she notes:

Today my husband and I do laundry, cook, and clean daily, but we also pay a Salvadoran woman to clean our house. Every other Thursday she drives from her apartment near downtown Los Angeles to our suburban home to sweep and mop the hardwood floors, vacuum the carpets, dust the furniture, and scrub, wipe, and polish the bathrooms and kitchen to a blinding gleam. I love the way the house looks after she's done her job; but like many of the employers that I interviewed

for this study, I remain deeply ambivalent about the glaring inequalities exposed by this arrangement—and exposed in particular visible and visceral way. (xiv)

Hondagneu-Sotelo's as a renowned sociologist at a prestigious institution of higher education, places her in a position that affords her the luxury of paying another woman to do her housework. Her stance on feminism and social equality, however, create anxiety as her hiring another woman seems to contradict her own argument, and, although she is aware of everyday inequalities as a consumer, it is her face-to-face interaction with her domestic workers that troubles her. Hondagneu-Sotelo, nevertheless, are quite common among other Latina feminist scholars such as Mary Romero and Emily Hicks. Conversely, the same concern is not present among Mexican feminist scholars. Class discussions within the Mexican context are equally elusive.

While writings on race and class are prevalent in Chicana/o literature, literary/social/cultural criticism, such topics are often overlooked in Mexico. With the exception of the romantization of indigenous peoples, and life in the countryside, race and class are rarely found in the discussion of Mexican society. An obvious reason for the abundance of race/class texts in Chicana/o criticism lies in the many such scholars' background. Having grown up as an ethnic minority and, for some of them, in financially disadvantaged households, Chicanas/os who choose to engage in such discussion can speak to the issues not only as informed scholars, but also from their own experiences.

Ana Castillo's work effectively links race and class while it claims a space for women like her: brown and poor. Her work advocates for a feminism that is inclusive of women who do not identify with "traditional" feminism. For her, white feminism fails to take into consideration the cultural/social factors that make her feminine experience different than that of her Euro-

American counterparts. In her *Massacre of the Dreamers*, Castillo explains the need for her to establish a space for working-class feminism in the American context beginning with a place to publish. In the introduction she asserts that it is crucial to consider

[...] the well-known fact that most renowned white feminists have come from middle- to upper-class backgrounds. This fact of their own orientation into society can never be excluded from their understandings of it, despite the occasional recent attempts at “political correctness” when including women of color in their analysis. I would like to note that when I speak of “white feminists,” I do not limit myself to North Americas but to the international white feminist movement, which includes Mexico, Latin America and Europe. (4)

As Castillo notes, Mexican feminist writers and critics come from privileged families and, in many cases, from European ethnic origins such as the case of Elena Poniatowska, Sara Sefchovich, and Rosario Castellanos. Their status as white, upper-class scholars places them in a position similar to that of mainstream (white) American critics. While these writers/critics do include issues of race and class in their works, the treatment of those topics are often “buried” in stories that are centered on white characters. The supporting (as opposed to protagonist) nature of brown working-class female characters in literature and cultural production mirrors the role of such women in society. Moreover, their racial/ethnic backgrounds are seen as a key factor in their low socioeconomic status.

Unlike the United States where racism was institutionalized for many years and, therefore, recognized as a social problem, it is uncommon for Mexicans to recognize that racism exists in everyday practices. Talking about racial inequalities is uncomfortable to a society that sees itself as entirely *mestiza*, thus racial differences are hidden underneath the surface. Class

differences, conversely, are not only acknowledged but enforced to preserve the *status quo*. However, the link between race and class, as obvious as it may be, is seldom publicly made.

Domestic and factory workers hold jobs with little prestige and low wages. Their position in Mexican society is determined by what Denise Segura identified as the “triple oppression” of Chicana workers in the U.S.:

The triple oppression, then, refers to the interplay among class, race, and gender, whose cumulative effects place women of color in a subordinate social and economic positions relative to men of color and the majority of white population.

The significance of this concept for Chicanas lies in the recognition of their limited options compared to white men and women as well as minority men.

Their inferior status is reproduced concurrently in the home and in all other social arenas. (48)

Segura recognizes that race, class, and gender work together in keeping working-class, brown women in places that do not allow for professional and economic advancement. In the same way, Mexican workers in the service and manufacturing sectors share many of the characteristics of Chicana workers in that their indigenous backgrounds are directly linked to their socioeconomic status. As Segura asserts, female workers position in the workplace function in the same manner at home.

The discussion of issues of work and class show how subaltern characters negotiate with their wealthy counterparts, and with society-at-large, in order to resist “power.” Even though “power” is beyond the grasp of the subaltern, the dynamics of resistance between employer and employee are always present. When Teleca in Elena Poniatowska’s “Love Story’s” gives unsolicited advice to her live-in maid Lupe, she engages in a maternalistic practice seeking to

exert control over the worker. In the domestic realm, however, the employer fails to “effectively” control the employee as Lupe not only does not follow her advice but openly defies Teleca’s authority. Disagreements, and violent arguments, as Hondagneu-Sotelo asserts, are not uncommon in the domestic employer/employee dynamics. She notes:

Although the employees are not wholly blameless in these blowups, the primary responsibility seems to rest with the employers, who don’t like feeling that they’ve lost the upper hand in their relationship with their nanny/housekeepers. When employees ask for raises but refuse to assume new job duties or work schedules, or when employees exercise autonomy in disciplining and caring for the children, they may unwittingly spark a blowup; even the act of giving notice may signal that the employer has lost control. (121)

Teleca’s lost of control is ultimately confirmed by Lupe’s abandoning of her job.

Much like the maids, the nannies are a crucial part in the effective organization of the households in which they are employed. Domestic workers caring for children are especially important as they develop bonds with their charges that have the potential of rearranging the family dynamics. Yet, despite of the responsibility of looking after their employers children, nannies are rarely recognized for their work or given the opportunity to remain a strong presence in their charges’ lives. In her *Just Like Family*, Tasha Blaine draws on her own experience and that of long-time nannies to illustrate the complexities of being inside a household yet remaining an outsider to the family, as in the example provided by one of her subjects:

She fell in love with the boys under her care, sharing every meal with them, spending days by the pool, and discussing their innermost thoughts. The boys’ mother lavished her with gifts, remembered her birthday every year, and bragged

to her friends about her great nanny. [...] The reality was far more complicated. Within two years of Emma's leaving the job, the family had essentially forgotten her, not even responding to her wedding invitation. (15)

Not surprisingly, the same can be said of the nannies present in Mexican literature as in the examples of *Balún Canán* and *La 'Flor de Lis'* where the nannies are quickly replaced and vanished from the children's lives.

Even though the nannies have a major impact on the family dynamics as they function as substitute mothers with the potential to influence their charges to be more socially conscious, their relationships with them are not fully developed as they are separated before effective change can happen. The transformative potential in the nanny/charge relationship is cut in so that the hegemonic order can be kept intact. Race/ethnicity is at the core of this strategic severance of emotional ties since privileged (white) children must assure the continuation of their families' position of power within their society and their association with the "lower" classes would prevent them from doing so.

The intersections of race, class, and gender are also quite visible in work at the border assembly plants. Work at the *maquiladoras* provide young women with the possibility of improving their families' economies, but it is not without physical and emotional dangers.

The growth in the number of assembly plants along the border combined with the decrease of viable economic activities in rural, impoverished areas of the country, contribute to the sustained influx of workers from southern Mexico to border cities. Paradoxically, the promise of a bright economic future for young workers is often truncated by their own employers' work practices. Because these young women are thought to be disposable, neither the government nor the *maquiladora* management take the necessary measures to assure their

workers' well-being. In her introduction to Marjorie Agosín's *Secrets in the Sand*, Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman notes that:

Policies at the plants continue to endanger their employees. The most outrageous is the rule that turns workers away if they are as little as three minutes late. Workers begin and end their late night shifts with no police or security patrols to protect them. To make matters worse, the young women who have been brutally murdered suffer a second death when a negligent press that accuses them of being drug addicts and prostitutes slanders their reputations. (17)

Moreover, because of their lack of money and connections, their disappearances are seen as unimportant. A poem by Marjorie Agosín best describes the young women's position:

Las desaparecidas de Juárez son pobres
Sus vidas son oscuras, invisibles
Vienen de lugares extraños de la zona de Chihuahua
Algunas de Durango
Son delgadas y jóvenes
Sin caras de porcelana.
Nadie conoce sus apellidos:
Lozano, Pérez, Hernández
Nadie desea conmemorar sus muertes
Las señoritas extraviadas de Juárez
No tienen dinero
Mejor no hablar de ellas (48)

The disappeared girls of Juárez are poor
Their lives are dark, invisible
They come from strange places in the State of Chihuahua
Some from Durango.
They are slender and young
And don't have porcelain faces.
No one knows their names:
Lozano, Pérez, Hernández
No one wants to commemorate their deaths
The missing señoritas of Juárez
Don't have money
It's better not to talk about them (translation by Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman)

The poem effectively highlights the young women's invisibility due to their racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds. As in the case of the domestic workers, *maquiladora* workers are a key element in the proper functioning of a productive society, yet they are not seen. Furthermore, they are often times "created." Their personas are formulated according to the very structure that employees them.

In dealing with the politics of gender that perpetuate dominant gender structures, *maquiladoras* mirror the patriarchal structure of Mexican society. Devon Peña asserts that:

[...] a predominantly female assembly line stratum is subject to supervision by a predominantly male stratum. Thus, in the maquilas the task of productivity supervision is under control of male technicians, engineers, first-line supervisors, and production managers. Moreover, the unique native features of male/female relations are transferred from the general social milieu to the factory setting: the "maleness" of factory command is partly a transplant from the traditional, patriarchal Mexican household. (80)

The dynamics of power in the assembly line, thus, reproduce the male-dominated structure of the home with the women being "supervised" by the (male) head of household.

While managers create a pattern of gendered workers for their factories (based on their notion of desirable femininity), Salzinger underlines the marked difference in the community's perceptions of the hiring of young women in the *maquilas*:

In marked contrast to the sanguinity of transnational managers about these desirable new workers, the preferential employment of young women in the maquilas elicited troubled discussion in local media and conversation about the erosion of "traditional" patriarchal structures. These anxieties were—and are—

particularly evident in Ciudad Juárez, where concerns about the industry's preference for women were sharpened by the city's economic dependence on the maquilas and its national reputation for deviant sexuality and gender roles.

(Salzinger 38)

Their ability to make money, therefore “invading” male territory, allows for increased female participation in the decision-making processes of their households. However, because this entrance openly challenges the rigid notions of gender roles, women workers are demonized and therefore blamed for the violence against them. Despite the differences in the nature of domestic and *maquiladora* work, when dealing with dynamics of power, working-class women show resistance to the control mechanisms imposed upon them, but do not fully achieve actual power due to their subaltern position.

Regardless of the effort to include working women in feminist discussions, academic feminists' views and the actual working-class female experience differ greatly. As a result, academic discussions of “female issues” are irrelevant to those activists who engage in “popular feminism.” While academics are concerned with feminism as a theory, popular feminists seek to resolve more immediate issues.

In the analysis of texts dealing with the relationships between domestic workers (including nannies) and their employers, domestic workers find places of resistance that challenge hegemonic power. However, when it seems like domestic workers can take the place of mothers, their class and ethnicity proves to be a block that prevents them from fully developing relationships with their charges as the children become aware of their high social status. Women working outside the domestic realm like the young women of the *maquiladoras* of the text analyzed, have very little room for resistance as they are seen as over-sexualized

disposable labor objects who are only allowed to produce the goods they manufacture but are prevented from reproducing. Although these findings are quite apparent, there is little work done on the subject by Mexican feminist scholars of literary/cultural studies. This work is an attempt to correct such exclusion.

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- SPAN 232- Spanish Language and Culture IV (Spring 2010, Fall 2009)
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- SPAN 430- Independent Study: Professional Conversation (Fall 2008)

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- SPAN 1411- Elementary Spanish I (Spring 2010, Fall 2009)
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- SPAN 225- Introduction to Hispanic Literatures I (Summer 2008, Spring 2008)
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- SPAN 232- Spanish in the Community (Spring 2007)

- SPAN 227- Introduction to Hispanic Literatures II (Fall 2006)
- SPAN 228- Spanish Composition (Summer 2006)
- SPAN 143- Spanish for Heritage Speakers II (Spring 2006)
- SPAN 456- Mexican Film (Fall 2005)
- SPAN 208- Oral Spanish (Fall 2007, Fall 2006, Spring 2005, Fall 2004)
- SPAN 200- Readings in Hispanic Literatures and Cultures (Spring 2006, Spring 2004)
- SPAN 214- Spanish Composition (Fall 2004)
- SPAN 220- Oral Spanish (Summer 2004, Spring 2003)
- SPAN 127- Spanish for Heritage Speakers II (Spring 2003)
- LLS 260- 20th Century U.S. Latina/o Literature (Fall 2002)
- SPAN 125- Spanish for Heritage Speakers I (Fall 2002)
- SPAN 103- Intermediate Spanish (Spring 2002, Fall 2001)

PUBLICATION IN PROGRESS

- “Space, Crime, and Gender in Border Cultural Production.” *Gente de Frontera: The Mexico-U.S. border in Hispanic Literature*. Eds. Bob Hunter and Jeffrey Oxford. (accepted)

PUBLISHED WORKS

- “Paz, Paredes Margarita.” In *Latin American Women Writers: An Encyclopedia*. Eds. María Claudia André and Eva Paulino Bueno. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- “Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda: Sabina Berman y el feminismo mexicano contemporáneo.” *Revista de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea* 27.11 (2005): 109-116.
- “New Story of the Eye.” Translation of “Nueva Historia del Ojo” by Humberto Beck. *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 26.1-2 (2004): 86-90. Also published as “The False Other of the Cinematic Conscience.” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 22.4 (2005): 59-62.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

2009-present	National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies
2009-present	MLA group, Feministas Unidas
2009-present	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
2008-present	MLA group, Mexican Cultural and Literary Studies
2008-present	South Atlantic Modern Language Association
2006-2007	North Central Council of Latin Americanists
2006-present	Asociación Internacional de Literatura Femenina Hispana
2003-present	Latin American Studies Association
2002-present	Modern Languages Association (MLA)

CONFERENCES/INVITED PRESENTATIONS

- “The Intersections of Work, Gender and Crime in Border Cultural Production,” 30th Cincinnati Conference on Romance Languages and Literatures, University of Cincinnati, 2010
- Modern Languages Association Convention, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2009 (attended)
- National Heritage Language Resource Center’s Third Heritage Language Summer Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009 (attended)
- “My Educational Journey,” Summer 2009 Youth Leadership Summit, Texas Lutheran University. Invited by the Seguin Independent School District Special Populations Office, Seguin, Texas, 2009
- “16 de septiembre.” Invited by the Mexican American Students Association (MASA) Registered Student Organization- Texas Lutheran University, 2008
- “Sabina Berman’s *Backyard* and the Feminization of the Border,” Latin American Studies Association Congress, Montreal, Canada, 2007
- “Gendering the Border: Sabina Berman’s *Backyard*.” Invited by Amnesty International 124. Stop Violence Against Women, Activists’ Conference – University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2007
- “Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Amores Perros*: Violence and the City.” Invited by the “International Illini” Registered Student Organization – University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2006
- “A Brief Introduction to the Spanish Language.” Invited by the “Together Encouraging the Appreciation of Multiculturalism (T.E.A.M.)” Registered Student Organization – University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2006
- “Work, Gender, and Border in Sabina Berman’s *Backyard*,” Mid-American Conference on Hispanic Literatures, University of Missouri, Columbia, 2006
- “Domestic Work, Fiction, and Agency in *La señora de los sueños*,” North Central Council of Latin Americanists Conference, Minnesota State University, 2006
- “Agency and Domestic Space in Contemporary Mexican Cinema and Literature,” Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Brown Bag Series, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005

- “De hogares y viajes: la formación de la identidad femenina mexicana,” X Jornadas Metropolitanas de Estudios Culturales, Casa Lamm, Mexico City, 2003
- “Corrine o el poder de la invisibilidad.” Puerto Rican Studies Association, Chicago, Illinois, 2002
- “El feminismo (no) performativo de Sabina Berman,” VII Congreso de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea, University of Texas at El Paso, 2002
- Ronald McNair Scholars Research Conference, University of Tennessee, 2001 (attended)
- “*Heroes and Saints*: Fragmentation and Chicana Feminism,” Summer Research Opportunities Program Conference, The Ohio State University, 2000
- V Congreso de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea, University of Texas at El Paso, 2000 (attended)

ACADEMIC HONORS AND AWARDS

- Faculty Grant for travel to the 30th Cincinnati Conference on Romance Languages and Literatures, University of Cincinnati, 2010
Faculty Compensation and Evaluation Committee
Texas Lutheran University (Spring 2010)
- Faculty Grant for travel to the Modern Languages Association Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2009
Faculty Compensation and Evaluation Committee
Texas Lutheran University (Fall 2009)
- Faculty Grant for travel to Honduras on exploratory trip for course to be taught in Spring 2010
Faculty Compensation and Evaluation Committee
Texas Lutheran University (Spring 2009)
- Conference Travel Grant for travel to the Latin American Studies Association Congress, Montreal, Canada
The Graduate College
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Latina/o Studies Program
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Texas State University – San Marcos (Summer 2007)
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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Spring 2008, Fall 2007, Fall 2006, Spring 2006, Spring 2005, Fall 2004, Spring 2004, Fall 2003, Spring 2003, Fall 2002)
- “**Women and Work in Mexico**” Reading Group Grant – Awarded by the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities (2005-2006)
- Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Fellowship
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2006-2007, 2005-2006)
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Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese
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- Illinois Consortium for Educational Opportunity Fellowship
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2004-2005, 2003-2004)
- Conference Travel Grant for travel to the VII Congreso de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea, University of Texas at El Paso
Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Fall 2002)
- Graduate Opportunity Fellowship
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2000-2001)
- Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP)
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Summer 1999)
- Sigma Delta Pi (Spanish Honor Society)
University of Texas at Brownsville (1999)

ACADEMIC, COMMUNITY, AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

2010 **Honduras Public Health Mission, Team Member**
Community service provided in rural communities of Siguatepeque, Honduras.

2010	“The Role of Racial Opportunity Cost in the Educational Experiences of Academically Successful Students of Color,” A lecture by Dr. Terah Venzant-Chambers, Organizer Lecture in celebration of Black History Month (Texas Lutheran University)
2010	Spanish Conversation Table, Organizer and Faculty Leader (Texas Lutheran University)
2010	Spanish Language Program Development Plan In charge of evaluating Spanish Language Programs across the nation to further develop university’s own program (Texas Lutheran University)
2009-2010	Member, Mexican-American Studies Committee (Texas Lutheran University)
2009	Oaxaca Public Health Mission, Team Member Community service provided in rural communities of Oaxaca, Mexico (Texas Lutheran University)
2009	Azul Presents: Un viaje al rededor de Latinoamérica, Organizer Concert in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month (Texas Lutheran University)
2009	Honduras Public Health Mission, Team Member Community service provided in rural communities of Siguatepeque, Honduras. Served as the faculty leader to four university students (Texas Lutheran University)
2007	Interpreter, College of Education (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2006-2007	Member, Graduate Curriculum Committee, Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2006-2007	Member, History/Latina/o Studies Program Search Committee (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2006	Translator and Interpreter, Latino Immigration Forum (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2006	Translator and Interpreter for Spanish-speaking parent Summer Orientation (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

2006	Member, Finance Committee, Paul Borgeson Poetry Recital, Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2005-2006	Member, Lectures and Arrangements Committee, Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese (University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign)
2004	Translator and Interpreter, Multicultural Youth Conference (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2001-2002	Foreign Languages Tutor Coordinator, Office of Minority Student Affairs (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2001	Graduate Assistant, McNair Scholars Program (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2001	Graduate Assistant, Office of Minority Student Affairs Summer Orientation (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
2000-2001	Graduate Counselor, Office of Minority Student Affairs (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

REFERENCES

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